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# THE TOWER GARDENS.

A Novel.

BY

LIZZIE ALLDRIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "BY LOVE AND LAW;" "THE WORLD SHE AWOKE IN;"  
"THE OLD ABBOT'S ROAD," &c.

"Now was there made, fast by the Touris wall,  
A garden fair."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE  
TOWER GARDENS.

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CHAPTER I.

JESSIE.

**I**T was the night of the seventh of April. Jessie Bayliss had drawn up a little round table so near to the fire that it was a marvel its one mahogany leg did not ignite; it was already rough with minute blisters, the result of many scorchings.

On that little round table was an elderly black straw hat, some weather-worn black velvet and sundry bows of crape, soft with age.

The crape, as a trimming, had had its day, and a long one too. Its owner had just been using it to rub up the velvet with which it had shared eighteen months of very hard

wear, in the rains and mists of the North Countries.

Out of these unpromising materials Jessie had been trying for some time to make a new and beautiful covering for one of the prettiest heads to be found on the Scotch side of the Western Borders—her own.

She had made several attempts. She possessed, or thought she possessed, a masterful way with such things ; but to-night that gift failed her. Alison, her cousin, having succumbed to a bad cold, was in bed and asleep ; Jessie had no one else to encourage her, no one to admire her cunning devices, to sympathise with her failures, to urge her to try again ; no one to talk to, to laugh at ; so she pulled her work to pieces, stuck her long needle into the solitary reel of black cotton, and turned shivering to the fire.

It was a bitter night.

The toes of Jessie's slippers were scorching, but to get warm all over was impossible ; and Jessie's fire was not built up with customary Birrendale generosity.

It was April by the calendar ; in London, in the Tower Gardens, the lilacs were in bud ; in Birrendale it was winter then, as it had been for nearly six long months.

I almost wish Jessie had not turned away

from the lamp-light when she did, because you might have seen her features a little better then ; and they were distinctly worth looking at.

But perhaps it was as well ; poor child, she was not at her brightest that night ! Who could be while the wind was howling round the house like a pack of famishing wolves, with a fierce dismal sound that brought to mind only too vividly that other more terrible wolf that Jessie knew, only too surely, was already sniffing about the door of her own home ?

Jessie shuddered and sighed.

“ Once before, when I was a little girl, I had the same dreadful, eerie feeling that haunts me now so often, whenever I hear that noise,” she said to herself. “ Aye ! but it’s dreary, dreary, dreary ! Oh, if that river would only leave off rushing and tearing on these rough nights ! If that wind would only leave off howling ! I never can help thinking of my father being drowned ! It brings back all that awful time so horribly ! What is going to be the end of this ?—it can’t go on ! We shall all be dead soon, if it lasts much longer.” And she looked into the fire very sadly.

It was Jessie’s part to supply brightness in that desolate household, and for the most part

she supplied it liberally. As a rule her brightness was as natural and spontaneous as a sunbeam's, but to night it had died down; she had not enough for herself, and none for other people.

"Auntie's all alone, I must go to her, I suppose," she thought; but to go to her seemed a very disagreeable duty.

"She doesn't need me," she said. "She won't speak a word to me. She will only make me more eerie. Well, I must go! Duty's duty! I hope Alison's cold will be better to-morrow. I really must have some one to talk to! Ah!" and instead of rising to go to her aunt, she bent nearer the fire—"Ah! Mac Carruthers! I suppose you're enjoying yourself finely in the sunny south!" she went on, addressing a young man who was often in her thoughts, and just then in her mind's eye. "How I should like to be in a warm place, where the sun shines!—or—I don't think I could be very miserable anywhere with Mac Carruthers;" this last sentence, however, came from a different part of her consciousness than any of her previous thoughts, and it made her smile, which she did freely upon the least provocation. And it also made her linger over the fire.

She certainly had the most exquisite

mouth! She always had had; even as a child everyone had wanted to kiss it. The mouth itself was sweetly, beautifully drawn, delicately modelled, sensitive to the slightest emotion; now bending with a smile into free and winning curves, now straightening into a wistful pathos, but always beautiful and very tempting.

A thought made Jessie blush deeply; she raised a hand to her cheek and lightly touched that blush with her finger tips, as if to brush it away. Then she sighed; but it was quite a different sigh from any that had within the last hour gone before it.

"And to think how that fellow's enjoying himself!" she said. "I'm certain he's enjoying himself, and I'm —sh-o-o—sh-o-o—shivering!"

She couldn't quite make out whether she saw in the fire a grand foreign *table d'hôte*, such as she had read about, or an equally splendid foreign ball-room.

"But whichever it is," she went on after a while, "I can be certain as to what he's doing: flirting, of course."

A dozen different thoughts and feelings went with the words.

"And I'd be flirting, too, if I had the chance, I suppose," she added, presently. "That is, I

don't 'suppose,' I *know*. After all, what does it mean? Only that one likes to amuse and be amused. Well, then comes the question, whether—whether?"—the pause and thoughts not to be put into words. "Falling in love must be—is—why something very different, something very awful. I ought to know what it is. Poor, poor, sweet, dear little mother! I ought to know!" she said, solemnly, and with a shudder, that was not all due to the bitter cold. "Ah me! Ah me! why do I keep thinking of her—of her and of my father so much to-night? It is that dreadful rushing, roaring of the Birren! Oh! if it would only cease. I must go and look after Auntie. But, I wonder, now, I can't help wondering, what Mac's doing. Yes, I think, do you know I rather like poor old Mac! And he? Oh! I'm only one among half-a-hundred by this time! 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'—of somebody else. Very true, but supposing there isn't somebody else to grow fond of, or only the Boy Baird, what then? No, I can't stand that howling wind any longer. It wails so for the poor drowning people. Oh!" with a sudden cry of grief, "it's the seventh of April, the day my father was drowned! I must go!—I must go!"

She sprang up, hurriedly put out the candle,

and noiselessly opening the bedroom door, went into the passage that ran through the house. It was dimly lighted by one small benzoline lamp. She flew along the corridor, frightened by all sorts of vague terrors. The Dale's people said the glen below that house was haunted. Her own shadow, large and ghostlike, caught her up, passed her, went before her on the wall. She ran on, scarcely daring to breathe.

In the hall, at the end of the corridor, where burned another small, cheap lamp, might partially be seen a squatting Indian idol, sundry swords and other war-like trophies, and a couple of hats that had once belonged to Jessie's uncle, the late Captain James Bayliss, her father's brother.

She rushed across the hall and into the dining-room, which, although well furnished in modern light oak, looked to her unspeakably desolate.

Her aunt, Mrs. Bayliss, a pale-haired woman with a wind-spoiled complexion, dressed in the grimdest widow's weeds, was sitting near the fire, looking over papers. She always made the place seem desolate; but she was, at any rate, a living person; that was something to Jessie. Any living person was better than those ghostly shadows.

“How is Alison?” Mrs. Bayliss asked, without looking up; there was that on her heart that made it impossible for her to face her niece.

“Asleep,” returned Jessie, seating herself on the little stone wall that bounded the tiled hearth, and shivering with cold and a nameless dread.

“Then no doubt she’ll be better to-morrow,” said Mrs. Bayliss, turning the page of a letter.

“I’m sure I hope so,” said Jessie, “I’m wretched without her.”

Mrs. Bayliss, Alison’s mother, made no further remark; but went on with her papers for some time.

“I expect the last little calf will be dead before the morning,” she said, presently, in a tone of calm despair.

Jessie said nothing, but she felt a strange—no, not at all strange, only too common—a soreness about her heart.

“Everything dies here. We shall be dead soon,” she said, half under her voice. Mrs. Bayliss heard the remark, but made no reply; she knew it was only too probable.

Out of doors the wind howled like a whole starving menagerie; within Jessie and her aunt sat in most oppressive silence for some time.

"If you wrote to uncle John—to your brother, Mr. John Harbuckle—don't you think he would help us, Auntie? I'm quite sure he would—and be glad of the chance," Jessie ventured at last to say. She had been wanting to say this for several days past.

Mrs. Bayliss rose—went to the mantel-shelf and gazed steadily at a large coloured photograph of the late Captain in his uniform.

Then she turned and looked down at her niece on the stone coping of the hearth.

"Jessie," she said, with bitter emphasis, "my brother John, like the rest of the kind people, will be very glad to help us—*in his own way*. They'd see us starve sooner than help us in our way."

"Because they know it would be no good, Auntie," said Jessie, dropping her voice. "It would only be throwing more money into the sea."

"When you are a widow, my dear, it will be time for you to advise widows; not before," continued Mrs. Bayliss, emphatically, her voice hard with intense emotion. "Your mother, Jessie, would not have blamed me—she was a widow, and *she knew*."

Jessie was effectually quelled.

She sat in silence until the clock struck ten,

and then vanished to her own room, sad, lonely, and shivering.

By a rather strange coincidence, as events showed on that night, Jessie dreamed, when warmed with sleep, that she was walking along some well-remembered shore, by a placid sea, with her mother, who had now been dead more than seven years. She had dreamed of her many and many a time before, but always had awakened in distress; for, hitherto, that mother's face had come to her full of the same terrible look of bewildered anguish it had worn during the awful months that had elapsed between the day on which Jessie had last seen her father and her mother's own death.

That night, in her dream, Jessie and her mother both walked quietly hand in hand, as they had done on summer holidays long ago, and Jessie, without any fear, looked up into her mother's face.

The mother smiled gently and was gone.

Jessie awoke—for a moment, calm and happy as she used to be when a child at home, before the dreadful days came.

“Thank God I have seen you happy once more, dear!” passed through her heart and brain. “Thank God, I have seen your smile again.”

But she opened her eyes. The placid summer waves were gone ; the room was full of cold moonlight ; the ravening wind was still unsatisfied ; the angry stream was still tearing wildly down to the Solway.

## CHAPTER II.

### K N O W E   F A R M .

A MONG the rounded hill tops that gently rise above the Scotch bank of the Solway is an eminence of so peculiar a form that it has become a land mark for the whole country side it dominates.

With massive squareness and broad flat summit it stands out bold and abrupt above the soft and graceful curves of a low range, like a gigantic rampart or colossal earthwork made by man rather than by nature. I will call it Mount Agricola ; for the Romans, who always knew a good site, fortified this great mound ; and even now, in a solemn, grey twilight, when the stern green hill is dark as the stem of a spruce fir, it requires but a slight effort of the imagination to see a ghostly sentry still on duty among the mists that hang around its head.

That broad flat head is the highest ground for many a mile around. From it, on a clear summer day, when the wild thyme is bloom-

ing and the sheep are browsing on the hill side, one may see more counties, English and Scotch, than I care to mention. It looks over a lovely borderland, all fertile dales and green or wooded hills, following each other, in a seemingly endless succession, in great wave-like lines; as if a tumbling sea, without losing its form, had been changed into solid earth.

Down from those hills wander numberless little burns, that fall into larger streams as those streams hasten to join a swift river rushing to meet the Solway, before that Solway's tide has all run out to the great ocean, that is shining in the far distance like the dove in the Psalms, covered with silver wings and her feathers like gold.

One of the streams that run down to the Solway is the Birren Water, and it was in Birrendale that Mrs. Bayliss and the girls lived.

This is how they came to be there.

About four years and a half before the date of that April evening when Jessie talked to herself over the fire, two men were walking by the side of a salmon pool in the Birren. It was an exceptionally beautiful autumn afternoon, there was a sound of rushing water in the distance, but the deep pool was very still;

the heavily wooded banks were only yet touched here and there with gold and brown. On one side of the water, long branches dipped into the stream; on the other, tall firs, straight as cathedral columns, dwarfed the men who were walking between the great trees, and a bank, that would have been but one tangle of fern, bramble and meadow sweet, had not the old red sandstone cropped up here and there, supplying the needful drawing that made confusion picturesqueness.

All was very still and solemn; the bright sunlight that was fast ripening the oats on the uplands beyond the woods could hardly penetrate through the great boughs of silver fir over head.

The two men went on for some little distance in silence, at length one spoke.

“A fine fish, but he just broke me!” he said, dolefully. “I’ll not sleep to-night for thinking of him!”

The younger man, Captain James Bayliss, had already heard this lament a dozen times or more. He was tired of it.

“Lucky beggar you to have no more serious trouble to keep you awake!” he replied, in a tone conveying the impression that his thoughts and words were far apart.

“Well, your sleep ought to be sweet enough

after that unexpected windfall!" retorted the other, as if slightly wounded by his companion's unsympathetic tone.

"That's just it!" said Bayliss, "it is that windfall that won't let me rest."

"Aye!" threw in Major Johnstone. (There are a great many Johnstones about the Western Border; they and the Maxwells had a civil war of their own of very respectable dimensions in the days of Queen Elizabeth—of James the Sixth, I should say, there is no Queen Elizabeth in Scotland.)

"The question constantly agitating me now, is, how to invest that money to the very best advantage," continued Captain Bayliss, with a curious mixture of anxiety and self-importance in his tone.

Here they turned from the bank of the stream and took a rough brae-side path, beyond which a burn merrily trickled down over masses of red rocks to the river the two men had just left.

"Ah! happy thought! I know where we can get some tea!" exclaimed Major Johnstone, as Captain Bayliss paused, as if waiting for his friend's advice "this is Mackenzie's place."

"You don't say we're on private grounds?" said Bayliss, who was then paying his first

visit to Birrendale, “I thought we were at least a hundred and fifty miles from tea and civilization.”

They turned a corner of the woodland path and came suddenly upon a small plateau above the river and the banks.

Here, in the full sunshine, was a carefully kept lawn, where the children, in Japanese hats with great red bows, were playing croquet. Beyond the lawn was a broad drive and a red sandstone house, all ground floor.

“What a delightful bungalow! the very place I’ve been dreaming of!” exclaimed Bayliss, very much awake all at once.

Two of the children, a boy and a girl, catching sight of the Major’s well-known figure, ran up to him.

“Where’s the fish? We saw you playing him! We saw you, but you didn’t see us; you were too busy to look up. Has Muir taken him home?” asked the girl.

“He just broke me and got away!” said the Major, shaking his head ruefully; “and we’ve nothing but a dozen herling and five wee trout, and never a fish at all.”

“Arn’t trout fish?” asked the boy, a little southern visitor.

The girl laughed and the Major laughed.

“A salmon’s a fish here! Why, don’t you

know that? You don't know anything!" said the girl.

"Will your mother have some tea for us?" asked Major Johnstone.

"Yes, I know she will. But it's our turn to play now, so we must go," and off ran the children.

The men went to the drawing-room window; it was open, several ladies were within—tea was going on.

The men refused the invitation to enter; they stood by the window lamenting their ill luck. The ladies gave them tea in cups on which were painted sprays of purple heather. Captain Bayliss, who was English, noticed among the sugar at the bottom of his cup a Scotch thistle, with which national emblem the cosy over his hostess's tea-pot was also adorned.

While Major Johnstone was finishing his little chat with the ladies, Captain Bayliss turned his back to the window for a minute or two, and looked at the view of stream and wood, visible through a carefully cut opening among the trees. The mingling of clear, crisp air and warm autumn sunshine, through which he saw it all, made it seem to him quite perfect, for "Autumn," as the poet says, "is Scotch."

“What a sweet spot! What an exquisite picture of refined domesticity!” James Bayliss exclaimed, as he and the Major moved off between great banks of rhododendron towards a country road. Alas! alas! for the poor Captain, his doom was sealed.

“Aye,” assented the Major. “It’s just perfect!”

“The fact is,” said Bayliss, uneasily, as if about to make an admission that was open to criticism, “I’m looking out for a place myself.”

“Mackenzie will be leaving soon. His uncle’s dead, and he succeeds to the Nithsdale property,” said Johnstone, with a backward turn of his head to indicate emphatically the owner of the grounds they were going through.

“Is he? Then I’ll take it,” exclaimed Bayliss, “if it’s anywhere within my range.”

“Well, I’ll be glad of you for a neighbour. You’ll find plenty of old Indians round about here,” said Johnstone.

“The fact is,” and Bayliss paused, “*I’m going in for farming.*”

The Major stopped short, and stared aghast.

“The man’s daft!” he cried.

“I never was saner in my life,” returned Bayliss, somewhat nettled.

“Never saner! Then it’s a wonder they’ve

let you be at large so long," retorted Johnstone.

"What do you mean, Johnstone?" demanded Bayliss, with rising temper.

"Mean? I mean that if you need to get rid of your money, just pitch it into yon salmon pool, but don't——"

"But, my dear fellow, I've gone into the thing thoroughly; I've been studying it for some time now. I've worked it all out to a nicety. It must pay if it's properly managed; it can't fail! Eggs, three farthings a dozen; butter, sixpence a pound; fowls, two-pence——"

"Ho! ho! That's your line, is it? Then I know what you've been reading. I'd lay an even bet your portmanteau's crammed full of pamphlets. Put that trash into the fire!"

"Trash! But I mean to carry it out," cried Bayliss, with considerable temper.

"Then you're a gone coon, as sure as ever that fish broke me to-day! By the way, when we had that long palaver at the club, last spring, I thought you told me you were going in for art; for art—and, if my memory serves me, for literature?"

"Well," said Bayliss, with hesitation; "yes," they were upon the high road by this time, "yes, and I'm going in for art

still. I had some first-rate lessons last winter in Paris ; and I've just begun a portrait of my wife, that everyone says is quite a striking likeness ; really, I don't see that art need interfere with farming."

" And the literature ? "

" I don't mind admitting I dropped some money there," said Bayliss, with evident reluctance.

" You don't mean to say you bought a newspaper ? " exclaimed the Major.

" Why, no ; it wasn't quite so bad as that ; I was not quite so far left to myself. I—hem !—I worked up some of my own Indian experiences into a novel, and——"

" Hasn't the same thing been done before ? " asked Major Johnstone, without waiting for the close of the sentence. " Didn't Grey, and long Jim Smith, and MacArthur, and several others, attempt something of the sort ? "

" Yes, but not just in my way, I fancy. Seriously, though, I can't help believing that my book would have been a great success, only, you see, so few publishers know India as we know it."

" True ! but perhaps they know the British public rather better. So you published on your own account ? "

" I paid for the publishing, certainly ; and

then the beggar bolted, by Jove! and I lost my money, book and all. I've cut literature."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Yes, I've cut literature altogether, although I've a Manual of Fortification seething in my brain that's really too good to be lost to the Service. But there, I won't think of it; I'll strangle it! My mind now is wholly given to farming. My wife has long fancied she could manage a farm; now I've this little bit of money to lay out, I should be a brute if I didn't get her one."

"Still a model husband?"

"My wife says so."

"Well, she ought to know! Now here's a Birrendale farm. How do you think Mrs. Bayliss would like to live in that white-washed house with the drab window frames?"

"Of course I don't mean that sort of thing. We should live, say, at the place we have just left."

"Then you think Mrs. Bayliss wouldn't care to come out in that yard in the depth of winter and slice turnips for a couple of dozen cows? The people here all work early and late, live hard, and only just make both ends meet."

"Ah, but I am going to bring modern

science to bear upon it," said Captain James Bayliss, knitting his brows with great energy.

" You won't beat the science of a Birrendale farmer, depend upon that ; why, yon barley-field was a moss a dozen years ago ! But, joking apart, Bayliss, think of your wife and those two very nice girls, and don't, there's a good fellow, don't turn farmer ! Unless, indeed, you're positively *anxious* to die penniless ; in which case the farm will enable you to do so very comfortably."

As well might Major Johnstone have attempted to reason a young man out of a wished-for marriage as Captain Bayliss out of a new hobby.

Before many months had passed, James Bayliss, for the time being the happiest man in the world, was the owner of Cauldknowe, that charming place where they had had those insidious cups of tea, and also of the Knowe farm adjoining.

The Major shook his head when his friend told him of his purchase.

" Well, Bayliss, if you *will* cut your own throat you *must*," he said ; " but I am sorry mine should have been the hand that passed you the razor."

James Bayliss and Mary his wife both agreed that if a thing was worth doing at all,

it was worth doing well. Cauldknowe was to be the first really settled home they had had in all their married life, for hitherto they had been moving about at duty's call; but now the Captain had retired from the Service and they were free to make a home for themselves. Their goods and chattels were but few, which was, they thought, fortunate, as it gave them an excellent opportunity of putting entirely new furniture into Cauldknowe; and, as every one knows, furniture is now very much better than it was at the time James and Mary Bayliss were married; besides which, the Captain rather prided himself on his artistic culture, and was glad of the opportunity of displaying the progress he had recently made in decorative art.

So they spent a good deal of money upon Cauldknowe.

Then the Knowe farm had been, the Captain thought, much neglected. It required fresh draining, new steading, fresh and expensive machinery, before modern science could be effectually brought to bear upon it.

So they spent a great deal of money upon the Knowe farm.

Spending money was still a new luxury to them: they enjoyed it very much, more than

they had ever enjoyed anything before, since their honeymoon.

There was a brief time in the lives of James and Mary Bayliss, and the girls, Alison, their daughter, and Jessie, their niece, during which they lived in an earthly paradise; there was one brief Scottish summer, one glorious Scottish autumn, when all was radiant with happiness and hope; a few months that in retrospect seemed as absolutely perfect as a sunny day in Birrendale.

And then came steady failure.

The winter snowed them up for many a week together; the spring was black and desolate; summer, long waited for, came not; in autumn there was rain, and rain, and rain. The fields of ripe oats, the delicious fragrance of which had helped to lure the Captain to his ruin, gave place to acres of soddened stalks beaten down and discoloured by the tempest. It was October before the little that remained of the drowned hay could be got in; but that fatal year was only the beginning of sorrows. Let us draw a veil over the miserable details.

Far better would it have been if James and Mary Bayliss had thrown the legacy into the salmon pool, by whose still depths it had been so blissful to sit together on summer evenings,

while the girls made posies of blue-bell and meadowsweet, than to have sunk, not only their money, but themselves, in that all-devouring farm, that “daughter of the horse-leech,” that cried for ever, “Give! give!” but gave them nothing in return.

It was a heart-rending failure. Of course, everyone except themselves knew it must prove so; but the more they lost on the farm the more desperately they clung to it.

The poor Captain, although he had no knowledge of farming, had plenty of theories, which, in spite of the ruin they brought on him, he cherished with the affection of a parent for his sickly offspring. He had always something new to try, and, at last, on one of his men objecting to use a new reaping machine, different from any he had ever met with, Captain Bayliss took the machine in hand himself, and was so badly injured that after many weary weeks of suffering and prostration, he was at last convinced that he had been wrong all the way through.

But it was too late, then, for he was on the point of leaving, not only his farm, but this world altogether, before he fully realised how complete had been his failure.

He turned his face away from his wife, who

was sitting by his bed-side, trying hard to keep back her tears, and he moaned :

“A failure, Mary, a dead failure ; but not such a failure as I am myself. All the way through I’ve been a failure !”

Mary could control herself no longer :

“No, no ! dearest,” she sobbed, passionately. “In your love to me there’s been no failure, never, never dear ! In your care for the girls there’s been no failure, never, never once ! And—and—oh James !—James !—we’ve been so happy—and I’ve been so proud of you—so proud ! Ah, you’ll never know how proud—I’ve been—and—and—I always shall be !”

He feebly turned his head, stretched out his left hand to her, for his right one was so mangled he could not lift it.

“Is it so, love ?” he asked, with a faint smile ; and again Mary sobbed out her pride in him.

So, in spite of all, that wail, “So proud of you, so proud !” were the last earthly sounds that bore any distinct meaning to the failing senses of poor James Bayliss.

“John,” said the widow to her brother, an old bachelor, who lived in Trinity Square, Tower Hill, when he urged her to return to town with him after the funeral, “John, the

carrying out of my lost darling's plans is the sacred duty to which I devote my life!"

"Mary, it's sheer ruin," said John Harbuckle gravely, firmly, but kindly.

"I cannot be more ruined than I am. I have lost all in losing him," returned Mary, in a tone of quiet, resolute desperation, "I devote my life to the furtherance of his wishes."

"But you admit that at last he saw his mistake," John said.

"I admit nothing that would in any way reflect upon the clearness of his judgment. If the world thinks he was mistaken, it must be my life's work to show the world he was *not*," retorted the widow.

The heroism of which speech so touched the heart of the bachelor brother that he actually supplied her with more money to throw after what had already been lost, and returned to town trusting, he said, to time and what that would do for her.

Away from the sight of her grief, John Harbuckle was able to look at the matter from a business point of view; therefore during the next eighteen months he exchanged very few letters with his sister in Birrendale.

Mary understood what that meant; she ceased writing to him at all.

Alison and Jessie had a dreadful time of it with Mrs. Bayliss.

“I wonder sometimes,” said Jessie, often and often, “whether Auntie means to throw us to the wolves, too! Whenever the wind howls, which is nearly always, I can hear them. I don’t want to be thrown to them, do you, Alie?”

“I won’t be!” was invariably Alison’s resolute answer.

“You won’t be! Oh, but Auntie always has her way.”

“That will have to come to an end some day; but I can’t bear the idea of having to fight her. Perhaps I shouldn’t, only, you know, there’s you, Jessie. We must get mother to do what Uncle John wishes.”

Then the girls determined to seize an opportunity of talking to Mrs. Bayliss on the subject, but Alison, succumbing to a terrible cold, Jessie made the attempt alone, and was consequently signally defeated.

“Wait till you are widows yourselves, before you take upon you to advise a widow!”

That was all the girls would both together have been able to extort from Mrs. Bayliss.

“And as neither of us are even engaged yet,

there is every probability that we shall be starved to death, long before we have time to get married," said Jessie, when she told Alison of Mrs. Bayliss's remark.

It was on the night of the seventh of April Mrs. Bayliss made this remark. When Jessie returned to her room she had found Alison awake, and had told her of it, before she went to sleep and dreamt that blessed dream, in which once more she saw her own mother's smile. But even the memory of that brief glimpse of warmth and happiness could not prevent Jessie from shuddering in the bitter cold of the Northern winter.

## CHAPTER III.

### ALONE.

IT was the evening of the seventh of April, the evening on which Jessie Bayliss had sat over the fire in her bed-room at Cauld-knowe, scorching the toes of her slippers and talking to herself about many things, most of them sad.

Against this date in the mental note-book John Harbuckle carried about with him, he wrote, sometime afterwards :

“The day of the Upheaval.”

The day of the Upheaval had already been an eventful one for John Harbuckle, the brother of Mary, widow of the late Captain James Bayliss.

Early in the morning he had, by the merest chance, been present at the very moment when the workmen who were digging for the foundation of a large public building to be erected near his own house, had struck upon what he was certain must prove to be part of a bastion of old London Wall.

Such a thing does not happen every day :

“ Our friend, Woolcomb,” John Harbuckle afterwards said, in describing the scene to a common acquaintance, “ our friend Woolcomb was on the spot five minutes later: but, unfortunately, as I think, he was unable to take my point of view. I am afraid I somewhat wounded his feelings by the very decided tone in which I expressed my opinions. Indeed toward evening, the conviction that I had hurt him became so strong that I gave up my dinner with the Trinity Brethren and devoted a couple of hours to writing him a few lines. I felt I owed him an apology; and I fancy, too, that, on mature consideration, I was enabled to put my case in a more convincing manner than had been possible during the heat of argument. Woolcomb received my apology in the kindest manner, although I failed to win him to my views. That, however, is of comparatively little moment; our friendship remains not only unimpaired but is stronger than ever, I am thankful to say. At my age we cannot afford to lose a friend; it is so difficult to find a new one.”

John Harbuckle, on the evening of that eventful day, was sitting at a large table which was covered with books, absolutely engrossed in writing what he was pleased to

call, without any sense of the humour of the thing, “a few lines.”

An Argand burner, with a shade that once had been red but had now faded down to a tone most lovely to an artistic eye, threw a disk of brightness upon its owner’s paper and helped the fire to give to the room a dim but pleasant light.

The room was large and very full, being much crowded by old family furniture as well as by the innumerable articles John Harbuckle was continually bringing home and putting down anywhere.

It was an apartment difficult to classify. Clearly it was no drawing-room, for it contained a large dining-table and dinner-waggon, both, however, now loaded with a heavy meal, composed entirely of books and papers, and preventing the use of either the terms, drawing-room or study, although there were books enough in it to form a considerable library. It was, in fact, the “den” of the old bachelor of fifty-three, who was then writing those “few lines” to his brother antiquary.

John Harbuckle’s den! What have I said? Why every individual hair of its owner’s scanty locks would have risen with horror, could he have heard the words! What, call the dear room where his grandparents and

parents, his brothers and sisters and his own youthful self had lived, and in which some, including his own youthful self, had died—a den? Profanity!

Ah! the young birds had flown away, the old ones had been buried, but to its solitary occupant that room was a *nest* still; his home now as it had always been.

Built somewhere about the time of our illustrious first George one might say it was. There were three long, narrow windows flush with the outside of the wall, and each window had a deep settle and panels carved with wreathen work; being, it was said, by Grinling Gibbons.

On each side of a mantel-piece of the same period were two large arm-chairs, showing unmistakable signs of long and hard wear. They were tenantless now, standing empty, facing each other, where for many a year John Harbuckle's parents had used them. The last occupier, the mother of the elderly man at the table, had died in one of them, about two years ago. Her son had never yet allowed that sacred chair to be used; he never used it himself.

She was eighty-four when she died. Her son had been a tender nurse to her for many years.

The uncertain light from the fire and the

shaded lamp, half revealed a good many old portraits on the walls, notably John Harbuckle's paternal grandmother, a lady of majestic presence and powerful features, delicately arrayed as a shepherdess, and her sister-in-law with a wreath of ripe wheat and an airy arrangement of spotted gauze, as the goddess Ceres ; it having been the fashion in the remote times in which they were painted, always to represent a person as somebody else, by way of enabling friends the more easily to recognise the likeness.

A pair of card tables, once the property of the shepherdess, occupied the recesses behind the arm-chairs ; the shepherdess smirked forcibly over one, while her husband, as Lord Mayor, with his massive official gold chain, maintained a dignified composure above the mantel-piece, on which a clock, in a mahogany case with a roof in the shape of a pagoda, ticked as if in a desperate hurry to get to the end of all time.

But had John Harbuckle, a man of fifty-three, no companions except the portraits of ancestors more or less remote, and the photographs of Mary Bayliss and the girls which stood on the mantel-piece ? Surely children and grand-children should have been his surroundings ; and, indeed, might have been,

but for a circumstance that took place about twenty-four or five years before that evening.

That circumstance having occurred, John Harbuckle was now a bachelor ; with a memory—certainly, with an ideal attachment ; certainly also—but the memory (well, never mind that just now)—the ideal attachment, which had grown to be his master passion, was for that great city of which he so often fondly spoke (quoting Edmund Spenser, who was born not many yards from John Harbuckle's own birth-place) :

“Merry London, my most kindly nurse,  
That to me gave this life's first native source.”

John Harbuckle, as I have already said, was writing ; and when he wrote to an antiquary he liked to write on foolscap, at a large table ; he liked space and many books. He put his pen behind his ear every now and then, and going to the bookshelves, got down a thick volume or two or half-a-dozen smaller ones, pausing midway between the case and the table to read or search, but never returning any one of them to its place.

So, during the time he had been engaged upon “ those few lines,” he had collected John Stowe, and Strype upon Stowe, Howell, Pennant, Wilkinson, and a host of other authorities, besides maps, prints, manuscripts, note-

books without end, and an infinite number of volumes strongly bound in calf, bearing the City shield and dagger, supported by its familiar arrow-tailed griffins, and the legend, “Domine dirige nos,” all done in gold.

For these books it was necessary to use the long dining-table, at which his parents, himself and his brothers and sisters had dined for many a year, in the times gone by for ever. He dined there alone now (he and Mary Bayliss being the only survivors) when he would allow sufficient space to be cleared for his meals.

After he had written for two or three hours and had made many voluminous extracts, he ceased, drew the note-books towards him, and after a long and, to judge by his countenance, diligent search, he found the required passage, wrote it down, with a smile of genuine satisfaction playing about his face (he had a grave, but kindly and somewhat humorous smile), folded the many pages containing his “few lines,” addressed them to his friend, and put them into his pocket.

“I’ll just step out and post this,” he said, rising slowly; “I should like Woolcomb to get it as soon as possible. That last passage ought to settle him if anything will. But, like the rest of us, he loves his own opinions.”

Leaving his books still heaped in confusion upon the table, John Harbuckle opened the door of his room. On the dark marble slab outside the door he found several letters waiting for him ; for when it was known that he was writing, no one dared to intrude, except upon the most urgent business.

He took up the letters ; those addressed, “Messrs. Harbuckle and Co., Trinity Square, E.C.,” he laid aside at once, for he never opened business letters after five o’clock ; but with those to “John Harbuckle, Esq.” he returned to his chair by the Argand burner.

“Birrendale ! Birrendale ! But this isn’t Mary’s hand ! I hope—I hope—I trust—nothing’s wrong ! ” he exclaimed, with much agitation ; and hurriedly adjusting his glasses and muttering, “Birrendale ! not from Mary ! ” he opened the letter with the familiar post-mark and the unfamiliar hand.

It ran something like this :

“The Manse, Kirkhope,  
“Birrendale, N.B.

“JOHN HARBUCKLE, ESQ.

“My dear Sir,—I have often recalled with pleasure the brief but interesting conversation I had with you on the melancholy occasion of the funeral of your late brother-in-law, Captain James Bayliss.

The insight into your character I then obtained induces me to believe that you will not take this letter in any unfriendly spirit, nor feel that I am unwarrantably intruding upon your private affairs, when I venture to hint to you that, in my opinion, it would be better for your sister, Mrs. Bayliss, if she were nearer some kind and judicious relative, such as yourself, who would and could take the oversight of her affairs.

“I am aware of the very substantial aid you have already afforded her; aid that should have amply sufficed for her requirements; I fear however, that in spite of your kindness she will soon find herself most awkwardly placed if some one who has the right to interfere does not do so promptly.

“I do not think that merely pecuniary assistance would be of any real use to her; indeed my own feeling is that the reverse would be the case. I have endeavoured to reason with her, but in vain, as of course, I can in no way control her actions.

“I hear she has borrowed money from a man at Glasgow, in whose hands I should be very sorry to see any relative of my own. This, I feel, is a serious matter, requiring immediate attention.

“I am sure you are not aware of her po-

sition ; and as I have long esteemed her as a valued parishioner, I now venture to inform you of it.

“ You will be gratified to know that your niece Alison is developing something of the same love of antiquarian lore that you possess so strongly yourself.

“ She is an interesting girl. The other day she showed me, with many blushes, a short paper she had written on ‘ Our Border Towers,’ for which I have managed to secure a place in ‘ The Scottish Borderer,’ one of our local papers. As soon as it appears I will send you a copy.

“ Your sister’s niece, Jessie, is another very interesting girl, although in quite another way. It might perhaps be better for her, I venture to think, as well as for her aunt’s affairs, if she could be subjected to a somewhat stricter supervision than she is under at present.

“ I must beg you to believe, that in thus appearing to trench upon your domestic affairs, I am actuated solely by the desire to serve your sister, and to prevent annoyance to yourself.

“ I remain, My dear Sir,  
“ Faithfully yours,  
“ ANDREW BAIRD.”

Five minutes earlier John Harbuckle's thoughts had been entirely engrossed in "his few lines" to his friend. His family concerns and affections had been, so to speak, buried under the fragment of Old London Wall. Only so short a time ago, as he had been writing so eagerly at that book-covered table, it had been to him as if he had not a relative in all the wide world, nor an interest more modern than the building of that wall; when lo! the Scotch clergyman's letter had come down like a bomb-shell, scattering the superincumbent mass, and had brought all John Harbuckle's family feeling on to the surface.

The old bachelor was always nervous about his women folk; believing, in the depths of his heart, that in some things they were not much better than babies, and that if left to themselves they would inevitably get into terrible mischief.

Trembling with agitation John Harbuckle again went through Mr. Baird's letter. "Can I send a telegram at once? No, too late! Can't I catch the night mail? Too late—too late! What can I do? I must go to her at once! Dear, dear, dear me! Poor Mary! Poor Mary! What am I to do?" With many such exclamations he rose from his chair, and with the

fateful letter still in his hand he began to pace up and down the room as if distracted.

“Something horrible must be behind this?” he cried, as he nervously worked the letter between his fingers. “Something he doesn’t care to speak of must have forced him to write like this. He must have been driven to it. What can have happened? Good heavens! Perhaps she’s half starving those dear girls. What can I do? Why did I listen to her? Why didn’t I insist upon her coming back with me after the funeral? It was my duty to have insisted. Why was I so weak? Poor things! Poor things! And I must waste the whole of this night! I’ll go north by the first train to-morrow. Those poor dear girls! Why did I leave them? Why did I leave them?”

Good, kind man, he never thought of blaming his sister! The fault was his own; he took it all on himself. Of course if you leave women to look after business matters, it is their nature to get into trouble as certainly as a young child will get into mischief; but in the last case the blame attaches to the nurse, not to the child; in the first, to the man who neglects, not the woman who muddles.

“Mary and those girls in the hands of an unprincipled money lender! My fault! My fault! Entirely my fault! I must have them

somewhere under my own eyes. Poor Mary ! She is—hm ! She is *difficult*. I feel I've been criminally weak ! Yes, there's no other term for it, *criminally weak !*—very difficult to deal with, I must admit; but I ought to have been firm ! Poor, dear girl ! ” (Mary was forty-six). “ She always was too fond of her own way, but she's had many troubles. How could I have left her ? And to think I can't reach her until late to-morrow ! ”

He paced unevenly about as much of the room as was vacant ; but as he was in the habit of buying any odd piece of old furniture he thought really good and cheap, and of putting it down in any vacant place without much regard for suitability, the room by this time was far too crowded up for a comfortable walking ground ; so, instinctively, John Harbuckle determined to go out, feeling that there was a good dry piece of familiar pavement in front of the Trinity House near by, quite at his disposal.

He glanced over the letter, then went slowly out on to the broad landing and up to the row of pegs where hung his overcoat and his hat. He struggled into a thick coat, put a soft and much used wide-a-wake over his scanty grey hair, and went down a few steps of a fine old panelled staircase until a

baize door of the dingiest green came in sight. This door shut off his private apartments from the offices of Messrs. Harbuckle and Company, which occupied the ground floor.

“Poor dear Mary!” he again ejaculated, something in the look of the faded door recalling to him a Sunday, how long gone by he hardly cared to think, but around which the fresh beauty of childhood still lingered, when he, a strong lad of ten, had been running down those very stairs, and that same door had been pushed softly open, and his little sister Mary, returning from a voyage of discovery, had suddenly appeared, a miracle of three years old beauty. He had poised her lightly on his shoulder, and had run away with her upstairs; and his parents had laughed, how happily! how fondly! and had called her a flying cherub.

Very empty of humanity was the wide old house now. The parents were gone; the swift-footed boy was slow of movement.

“And Mary’s a widow, poor girl! Poor girl! And I can’t see her until this time tomorrow!” sighed John Harbuckle.

Past the baize door, slowly down a flight of stone stairs into a large entrance hall went the master of the silent house. He put his

latch key into his pocket and let himself out by a great double door that clangoured heavily behind him.

It was a cold moonlight night ; it was the seventh of April. Close before him, as he left his own house, were the tall bare trees of the gardens of Trinity Square ; beyond them, by lighted windows here and there, and a vast dim pile of battlements, the Tower of London made its awful presence vaguely felt.

From John Harbuckle's abode in the north-west angle of Trinity Square to the Trinity House was but a few dozen yards. John Harbuckle was accustomed to pacing up and down the open space in front of the Trinity House, and turned to it mechanically.

To-night, however, the Trinity House was brilliantly lighted up. Festivity evidently reigned among the brethren. Had it not been for those "few lines," John Harbuckle himself would at that moment have been a guest ; although so perturbed had he been that he had forgotten all about the feast.

He was in no mood for festivity, and he turned away, retraced his steps, passed his own house, paused for a moment under the worn hammered iron-work of the entrance to Catherine Court, Tower Hill, took a turn or two up and down that then deserted passage,

heard his footsteps echo between the tall wall at the other end, instinctively raised his eyes to a certain window in one of the Georgian houses in the middle of the Court, and to the long iron lamp rod that runs out horizontally from the wall (the rod to which he had once thought of hanging himself—it was nearly opposite the house where *she* had lived), and then leaving the Court, he crossed Great Tower Hill, and, being provided with a private key, entered, by the gate facing a vast block of bonded warehouses, the Tower Gardens.

It was an awful solitude ; but he was used to it, and it soothed him as he paced up and down the long path high above the great deep moat, that now was filled with moon-lighted mist. The Tower, with its grey walls, its bastions, its many lights, stood beyond the moat, the edge of each wall and turret gleaming white amid the heavy shadows of the great fortress.

To-night John Harbuckle took no notice of any of these things, beloved, venerated as they were by him ; he paced up and down the long walk, himself the only human being in all those quiet gardens. There, in the heart of London, he might have heard his own footfall, or his own heart beat, so far away from worldly noise it all seemed ; and yet, in reality,

he was but a few yards below a public thoroughfare, along which many a fellow mortal was still tramping.

In half an hour or so he had grown calm ; he had turned over his sister's affairs in his mind, and at last, after many an inward prayer, for he was a God-fearing man, he came to a determination as to how he would act.

Having so determined, his thoughts, set free again, went back to other times ; to that circumstance of four and twenty years ago that had made him now an elderly bachelor.

He paced up and down the long walk above the moat, a solitary figure in the solemn moonlight, with his head bent, his hands clasped behind him, and in the silence he heard :

“ His heart throb for the love of other years.”

Out of the past, out of the Scotch clergyman's letter, up from the mists of the Tower moat, there came to him one word, a name :

JESSIE.

And that name grew and grew until it filled all his thoughts.

Suddenly the stillness was broken up ; the garrison bugles sounded ; while from innumerable clocks came ten strokes of various sound, and John Harbuckle left the Tower Gardens.

He left the Gardens by the gate nearest St. Katherine's Dock House, having just remembered that Woolcomb's letter was still in his pocket.

There was a pillar-box across the road, and there, a few minutes later, he saw the last of his "few lines."

Now, it so happened that a large Continental steamer had lately arrived, and that, in consequence, a great many cabs were driving about; which, as there happened to be also a very unusual amount of heavy traffic going on just then, caused some little difficulty.

At the precise moment John Harbuckle was recrossing the road from the pillar-box, the wheel of a cab got locked within the wheels of a railway van.

A man put his head out of the cab window, and called to the driver to mind what he was at.

John Harbuckle started, looked round quickly, but the man's head was already withdrawn.

"That voice! If I didn't know he was dead, I'd have sworn to that voice." As the thought flashed through his brain, he went back a step and looked into the cab. There was nothing to be seen except a man's figure among many packages.

“Ah, I’ve been dreaming again! The sea doesn’t give up its dead in these days,” said John Harbuckle, with a sigh. “I’ve been dreaming! It’s not good for a man to be alone. I’ll go home and write to Mary at once. But—that voice!”

“No! no! no!” he went on, with an excitement that was gaining on him too rapidly to be controlled, “it’s impossible! yet, had it been possible, I’d have sworn to that voice!”

The upheaval caused by the Scotch clergyman’s letter was as nothing compared to the fierce volcanic eruption produced by that voice.

“He robbed me of my Jessie! Here! here—in these very Gardens!” he exclaimed, as he again turned into the long, solitary walk above the moat, and began pacing it with hurried, uneven steps.

Before, he had thought of her, of him, with the sad calmness to which, during many years, he had grown used. Now, time was, for the moment, annihilated. He was a young man again; with a young man’s passionate love and hate; the wild agony of that loss was as real, as fresh, as if the blow had only just been struck.

“He robbed me of my Jessie!”

He hurried on, mechanically, to a certain

spot, just as he had done four and twenty years ago.

At the other end of the walk, opposite the dark Beauchamp Tower, in which no spark of light now glimmered, there is a bench under some acacias ; in front of the bench the stone coping merely slopes upwards a little without its usual low protecting wall.

John Harbuckle came up to that coping and looked straight down into the deep moat, now all full of moon-lighted vapour, and what he had felt on that other long-past night when he had all but thrown himself down, came back to him.

Hundreds of times he had stood there since, but it was many years since he had lived that fierce hour over again as he lived it now.

That voice, belong it to whom it might, had touched a spring that was vibrating through every fibre of his being.

“He robbed me of my Jessie !”

The loss of her was as fresh as ever to-night.

He stood for a long while on that sloped coping above the moat until the storm had spent itself.

“Do I forgive ?” his conscience asked his heart, as soon as it could make itself heard above the inward tumult.

“ Do I forgive ? ”

The question came from the depths of his own soul, but the great prison fortress standing before him in the fitful moonlight gave a strange weight and solemnity to the words.

“ Do I forgive ? Ah ! with the dead there can be no quarrel. They are in God’s hands.”

He looked up earnestly to a clear space between great banks of clouds that had opened above the centre of the four turrets of the White Tower. Through that pure space, it seemed to him, one might travel upwards and upwards for ever and for ever, so high and lifted up it looked.

“ And now she is in Heaven, where they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, she seems once more mine,” he felt. “ Do I forgive ? I do, with all my heart I do.”

It was long before he left that spot ; as he turned away at last he said, with a heavy sigh and a sad relapse into something of his accustomed tone—

“ Ah, well ; God’s ways are past finding out. Arthur Bayliss robbed me of my Jessie, and now Providence is going to give me their Jessie to care for. Amen.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MAN IN THE CAB.

“I COULD have sworn to that voice!” and with the words rushing across his brain John Harbuckle had turned to look into a cab, the wheel of which was locked within the wheel of a heavy waggon.

He had seen in the cab a man’s figure sitting among many packages, but the face was too far in the shadow to render recognition possible; even supposing the face to have been one John Harbuckle might have recognised.

A moment or two later the cab wheel was free, and as John Harbuckle unlocked the gate of the Tower Gardens the cab driver put his horse to a brisk pace and drove towards the Minories.

The man in the cab sat with one arm extended over his packages, gazing through the windows at the blank rows of closed shops.

“A desolate home-coming!” he said to himself bitterly. “Home! what right have

I to use such a term, except that I can't help it, it haunts me so? All this great City full —home I have none; and to me just now, a home seems the only thing in the world worth having, the only thing I really care for. What a vast desolate place it is! all this great City full, home I have none."

The words repeated themselves over and over again like an endless monotonous chime heard in sickness.

There was a strange, ghostlike solemnity about the City at ten o'clock on that moonlight night. To the man in the cab the deserted streets seemed full of grave-stones.

Along Cheapside, Fleet Street and the Strand things looked brighter, but even there, except in the printing houses, the huge town seemed tired and anxious to settle down for the night.

The cab turned up one of the streets leading to Covent Garden and stopped before the Tavistock Hotel, a house much frequented by visitors from the colonies.

A commissionaire opened the cab door and the man got out.

He was tall and had to stoop a good deal as he did so.

The porters rapidly cleared the cab, while the owner of all the packages stood under the

lighted colonnade in front of the hall door, looking on with the air of one accustomed to have everything done for him.

A well-made man he was, tall, straight; square-shouldered, and he stood so firmly that if in all else he had not seemed strictly a civilian one might have taken him for a soldier. One rarely sees a civilian stand as this man stood.

The upper part of his face was overshadowed by the brim of a hard wide-awake; the lower part was hidden by a thick moustache and a heavy beard, both still showing here and there some traces of the original brown among the grey. The beard was well-tended, crisp and curly.

He paid the cab-driver liberally, walked into the hall, gave a few orders, went upstairs to the coffee-room, which was upon the first floor.

He had rather a lordly way with him that secured prompt attention.

His strong, buffalo-hide portmanteaux, which all bore the name of "Arnold Birkett," were much stuck about with Continental labels.

It would not have been difficult to have traced his route from Lisbon to Hamburg, nor, had anyone taken the trouble to search, to

have found evidence, that the said Arnold Birkett had not so very long ago been a passenger on board one of the African Mail Steamers.

The coffee-room of the Tavistock is long and low, with much dark mahogany about it; an eminently respectable, but by no means fashionable apartment.

At one of the tables Mr. Birkett seated himself, ordered supper, the evening papers, and a fire in his room. He took his hat off as he did so, showing a tolerably broad forehead, a nose straight and well-cut, but hardly of enough importance to be quite in keeping with the rest of his appearance. His still abundant hair was fast turning from brown to grey, it was close cut, but had a distinct tendency to curl, a tendency strictly repressed by its owner, who was, on the whole, a man not very far from handsome, although there was a yellowish tone about as much of his face as could be seen that certainly was not beautiful.

He read his papers with avidity, ate his supper like a man used to the ways of decent society, asked to be shown his room, and then retired, without having exchanged a syllable with any one except the waiters.

“A desolate home-coming,” said Arnold

Birkett to himself, as he stirred up the fire in his room and made it roar. "Not one word of welcome; not so much as a dog to look pleased! Ah, well! ah, well! what else could I expect? How could it be otherwise?" and he drew up a comfortable and very roomy easy-chair, well lined and padded, all covered with a cretonne as gay as English poppies and cornflowers could make it.

"Might have been worse!" spreading out his hands before the glowing coals. "A blazing fire in an open grate is something friendly, after all; and so"—with a shiver—"and so's this beastly old climate! Don't I recognise it! One's dear native land has its drawbacks. I say, what's this?" with another shiver, and his fingers on his pulse, "I shouldn't care to be laid up here with a rattling dose of African fever, and not a soul to look after one."

He felt his pulse carefully, and finding it not so very feverish, lighted a briar-wood pipe that had grown dear to him by long usage, in which operation he appeared suddenly to become wholly engrossed.

When the pipe was drawing to his satisfaction he again stirred up the fire and settled down to smoke and meditate.

His meditations could hardly have been

pleasant ones. He looked troubled, at times distressed.

Presently he took a small Russian leather case from his side pocket, opened it, gazed attentively at the portraits it contained, kissed them both affectionately, but rather in the manner of a man performing a customary act of devotion, to which some passing emotion restores, for the moment, the freshness that constant repetition has impaired, and then placed the case open before him on the mantelpiece, supporting it against an imitation Etruscan vase, and now and then looking up at it, went on smoking.

Both of the photographs were considerably faded as if they had been taken some years since.

One was the portrait of a woman whose face you could imagine might in life have been still almost youthful; a face it was that seemed made to look always bright, but which had grown, either from care or ill-health, sad and prematurely worn.

The other face was too faded to convey much meaning of any sort; but by the dress one might judge it was the portrait of a girl of ten or twelve, taken perhaps about eight or ten years ago.

Mother and daughter without a doubt.

One might have thought they were Arnold Birkett's wife and daughter, if, when he had finished his pipe, he had not so carefully, and as it were secretly, returned the portraits to his side-pocket; as if he did not care to have them seen by other eyes.

"How different it all might have been!" he sighed, as he replaced the case.

Evidently he had said the same words in exactly the same way many and many a time before.

Then his manner suddenly changed. He took out the case again, looked at the portraits again, a moisture as of tears that would never be shed dimming his eyes, and he whispered, kissing them fervently, as if they had suddenly come back to him, fresh and unfaded.

"Forgive me, my darlings! Forgive me, forgive me! How could I help it?"

Then putting up the case again, he threw himself on his knees by the bedside, flung his arms across the bed and buried his face against the counterpane.

Was he trying to make excuses to heaven? Was he bewailing the past? Was he seeking help for the morrow? Who can tell?

If he has done a great wrong will he have to bear the inevitable consequences for ever? Is there never forgiveness? or, if forgiveness,

is there for ever no release from the thraldom of one fatal act?

Ah! the dead woman *is* dead: the broken heart *is* shattered, beyond human skill to restore, the child's young life jeopardized may, perhaps, be ruined now.

He was long awake that night, but at length he slept soundly. Not once did the thoughts that had kept his brain wakeful, fashion themselves into a dream. Not on that night did that mother and child haunt him. He was so lonely that he would have been glad of their welcome had it been but in a dream.

## CHAPTER V.

“ OH PAST THAT IS ! ”

“ IN those other days, I should simply have climbed to the knife-board of a City 'bus and have gone down to the Bank ; now I suppose, that would be gross waste of time,” said Arnold Birkett, as he finished his breakfast the next morning. “ Which is the best way to get down to the City in these days ? ” he asked the waiter.

“ Depends on what you call ‘ best,’ sir,” returned the man. “ If you want to cross the river twice, see the Abbey, the 'Ouses of Parliament, the Embankment and cetera, why for that your best plan's Charing Cross to Cannon Street.”

“ Charing Cross ! Why, the City used to lie in the opposite direction in my time ! ”

“ So it does now, sir, only we start west to go east, that's all. You'll find the river rowt quite an interesting little tower ; I always recommend it, and ten minutes will do it, if you don't get blocked outside Cannon Street.”

“ Sounds inviting ! And the Underground, what’s that like ? ”

“ Not been by the Underground !—then you’ve a treat in store, sir ! The infernal regions in a Christmas pantomime isn’t anything near as like the real thing ; only I shouldn’t care to have a bad conscience when I go by the Underground ; the sulphureousness of it is so life-like, it brings it ‘ome to a man, and no mistake ! ”

“ Then I’ll go by the Underground,” said Birkett.

“ Charing Cross to Mansion ’Ouse then, sir. Do you know the way ? ”

“ Oh yes, thanks, I can find it. This part of London isn’t so very much changed.”

“ You’ll find it where old Hungerford Market used to be.”

“ All right, I remember.”

So after Mr. Birkett had looked through every paper in the room, and had watched a foreign fruit auction in Covent Garden, he went to Charing Cross and booked for Mansion House.

How his conscience was affected by the short journey I may not tell ; but I rather imagine that the atmosphere of the Underground so irritated both his throat and temper, that conscience was not roused to

painful activity by the “sulphureousness” of the air he was compelled to breathe.

He did not look amiable as he sprang up the metal-edged stairs and towards the upper world.

“Mansion House! Where’s the Mansion House?” he coughed, looking about him, when he reached the open air. “Where on earth am I? Well,” with another cough, “if that voyage through Pandemonium is a specimen of what modern science can do, all I can say is, I greatly prefer the canoe of the raw native! But where am I? Oh, that’s the new street, I suppose; and this? why this must be Cannon Street. Fine street, the new one! London’s grown much taller and brighter and wider since I last saw it. Mansion House? I see! Well, I won’t explore that brand span new thoroughfare just now, I’ll keep to the old ways if I can find them.” And he went down Cannon Street, paused when he came to the station, took a good look at it, went on to King William’s statue, which he was glad to find standing just where he had left it with the granite cable still wound round and round, as if it had never been uncoiled since last he saw it.

“Now I know where I am!” he said, after he had safely crossed the crowded street.

“That statue’s a land-mark I’m not likely to forget!”

He turned the corner and went along Eastcheap, here recognizing a well-remembered house, there observing a newer and grander building.

As he was passing the end of Rood Lane he pulled himself up sharply :

“That’s the very identical harp-player, and in the very self-same place,” he exclaimed.

He took a few steps up the lane.

“Where’s your blind friend, with the violin ?” he asked.

“In Abraham’s bosom, sir !” was the grave reply.

“And you haven’t found another ?” asked Birkett.

The harpist, who had never ceased playing, shook his head sadly.

Birkett gave him a shilling, and, retracing his steps, soon turned the angle of the road and was in Great Tower Street, and his face, which had been grave enough before, grew graver still, as his eyes caught sight of one of the corner turrets of the White Tower.

“Ah ! I feel where I am now, feel it to the deepest depths of my heart !” he said ; “I could find my way from here to there blind-

fold ! O the past ! the past ! the irrevocable past ! ”

He walked on steadily. Two turrets of the White Tower and a few boughs, just touched with green, now filled all the open space at the end of the street.

“ Oh, this is awful ! This is like going to her grave ! I can’t stand it ! I won’t go on ! not to-day ! ” he felt rather than said in his heart.

But he never turned, he went straight on.

“ The very Church ! It won’t do to look at it ! ”

But yet he paused before the porch of All Hallows, Barking, nearly at the end of the street.

His brows contracted as if with sharp pain and his eyes gazed at the fast-closed door as if they would pierce it.

“ The same ! No—altered like all the rest —something new amidst the old, and yet, the same ! And I, too, am altered ; yet—would to God I were not the same ! It must all be faced. I’ll face it now, if it kills me. Oh, if it would !—if only it would ! I ask nothing better than to be blotted out of existence this moment ! ”

Vain wish ! Not so easily can the burden of life be laid down. No, if that weight cuts

into the galled shoulders until they bleed, the burden must still be borne, unless--there is a Divine Promise comes in here. I need not quote it, so familiar are its gracious words to all. Happy they who have, by experience, learned it's truth !

Tower Street was crowded with huge waggons and many cabs. The grinding of the heavy wheels, the sharp click of the hard hoofs against the stone road-way never ceased ; the air was laden with the smell of spicery and drugs ; familiar sounds, familiar scents, bringing back how many a long by-gone day !

Birkett went on to the end of the street, and crossed a wide space among fish vans and the waggons of the bonded carmen to the pavement in front of the railings of the Tower Gardens.

Down below in the moat soldiers were being drilled, to the great amusement of a throng of squalid idlers.

Birkett went up to the rails, and stood between a group of Norwegian sailors, and a ragged urchin, as dirty and as picturesque as any Murillo ever painted, who was hanging on to the rails grinning with pure delight at the spectacle.

The Tower, the glancing of arms in the

moat, the strip of well-kept garden, the trees, two or three carefully dressed children with their attendant nurse-maid, bowling their hoops by the side of the fresh-dug flower-beds, where daffodils and primroses were blooming, made up a scene only too well remembered.

Birkett stood for some time watching the children playing about the same path along which on the night before John Harbuckle had slowly paced, thinking of his love of other days, and his face grew as wan as if he had had a severe illness.

“The Tower Gardens! Through what dreams, what fevers, what days and nights of desolation have I seen those Tower Gardens!” he said, turning away from them.

Do you remember that last evening, John Harbuckle, when he had found the pavement in front of the Trinity House too bright for him, had strolled up and down Catherine Court a few times before going into the Tower Gardens?

Arnold Birkett, seeking refuge from the noise and crowding waggons that filled all the south-west side of Tower Hill, recrossed the road and followed the houses

until he came to the weather-worn old iron-work above the gate-way of that very same court.

In the busiest time of the City day that court is comparatively quiet, as there is no thoroughfare, except for foot-passengers.

The houses where the rich Russian merchants used to live, in the days of the great Catherine, are homes no longer, merely business premises; but good, solid, red-brick houses they are still, with long, narrow windows, and white sashes flush with the walls.

To one of those long, narrow windows Arnold Birkett raised his eyes, and for a few seconds kept them there. It was the same window that John Harbuckle so often looked up at. It belonged to the house where SHE had lived.

Nearly opposite was the horizontal lamp rod, with its curious gridiron-like appendage, to which John Harbuckle had once thought of hanging himself. Arnold Birkett had never thought of hanging *himself* there, so he took no notice of it; but he did notice the stone steps of the house, now worn hollow in the middle by constant use, and he thought, with a strange mingling of tender grief and self-reproachful bitterness, how often her little feet had come across

the threshold and down those stone steps to meet him—beautiful little feet, that would never come to meet him any more!

He turned away, as a clerk, followed by an office boy, sprang up the worn steps of the house where she had lived; he walked slowly, and with bowed head, as if following a coffin to the grave, to the other end of the court, and then came back again.

The court itself, with its broad pavement and two lines of large houses, is not without a certain dignity. A very small amount of imagination could easily fill it with grave, bewigged and bewaistcoated merchants; ladies with powdered heads, patches and flowered damask gowns; sedan-chairs, link-boys, and all that goes with the date on the oblong tablet, set in relief on a square stone on one of the walls, where one may read, in characters such as one sees in a Tonson edition of *The Spectator*—

"Catherine Court, 1725."\*

To leave the court for Tower Hill you turn from the straight, broad pavement, and follow a path that twists by the side of a genuine shop of the period, which some artist ought to sketch at once, for although it can

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\* 1725. The year in which Peter the Great died and was succeeded by the Empress Catherine.

hardly be called lovely, it is still but little altered from its original condition, and will, no doubt, soon be either taken down or modernised.

Arnold Birkett was looking on the ground as the path wound out of the Court, but as he stood again under the fast-decaying iron-work at its entrance he raised his haggard eyes and met a view unique in all the world.

It flashed upon him like a sudden marvel of fresh beauty now, as it had done many and many a time before.

There just before him were the budding trees and the fresh green grass of Trinity Square; and behind that filmy veil of delicate green, all “clad in colours of the air,” stood the great pile of The Tower buildings, a multitude of great lines, harmonious yet broken up into a variety of detail most grateful even to eyes that knew not why they were charmed.

Long straight walls, bold round bastions, the great square White Tower with its four turrets, each differing, but each crowned; the light belfry of St. Peter’s Church (where sleep three headless queens), the many chimneied dwellings, the quaint Look-Out of the Bell Tower standing in mid air sheer against the blue sky—a mast or two beyond:

“And we have looked at it all together,

how many a time ! How many a time ! She, my darling, was with me when I first saw it ! It is all too beautiful, too dreadful ! All too like a dream, all too sadly real ! Oh, Jessie ! Jessie ! forgive, forgive me, dear !

"Too real ! There was a freshness in the new verdure of the trees that made that scene more life-like to Arnold Birkett than anything else he had yet revisited.

He would have been thankful for some refuge then ; but the church door he had not long passed was close-barred, there was no resting place there ; the Tower Gardens and those of Trinity Square were only for the privileged few ; there was no place for quiet, no place where grief could have its way unobserved, and, as an Englishman cannot show his feelings if he is observed, Arnold Birkett followed the unwritten law of the City and moved on.

He moved on mechanically to John Harbuckle's house, noticed the name was still where it used to be, then he went no further.

At the corner, by the great block of bonded warehouses, an old Irish woman, who swept the crossing there, implored him, in a ghost of a voice for the love of heaven to help her in supporting her starving family.

He put his hand in his pocket and gave her sixpence, for which she called down the blessings of all the saints upon his head.

After he had gone a few steps in the direction of Barking churchyard, which is immediately behind the bonded warehouses, he returned and adding another sixpence to his gift, asked,

“Have you held this crossing long?”

“Lord bless you, my good gentleman, and it’s me poor children’ll have such a supper to-night——”

“How long?” repeated Birkett, cutting her short.

“Near seven years, sir.”

“Then you know most of the people in the square? Does any one live in that house?” pointing to John Harbuckle’s. “The ground floor is offices, I see. Does any one live there?”

“Only the old gentleman, sir,” replied the woman, “and many’s the shilling he’s given me, or sure I’d be starved.”

“What old gentleman?” asked Birkett.

“Mr. Harbuckle, sir.”

“Any ladies?”

“Lord love you, sir! no, sir!” exclaimed the sweeper, dropping her professional whine.

“Mr. Harbuckle’s an old bachelor gen-

tleman, and there's never a lady there ; leastways, only Mr. and Mrs. Robbins as does for him."

" Well ! Good morning."

"Good morning, sir, and God bless you, and send you this way again very soon."

With which benediction still in his ears, Mr. Birkett turned into Barking churchyard.

" Then he's still there ! My poor little girl, where is she ? He knows ! Dare I ask him ? "

So thinking he walked on, looking as much shaken as if he had had a severe illness.

John Harbuckle had already posted his letter to his sister in the North. He had written it late the night before. It was dated April 7th.

## CHAPTER VI.

WHEREIN IS SET FORTH THE WILINESS OF AN  
INGENUOUS GENTLEMAN.

IT was the second morning after that evening, destined long to be remembered, on which Jessie Bayliss had added another severe scorching to the toes of her already scorched slippers, the evening of that sudden upheaval of John Harbuckle's buried affections and of the arrival of the man in the cab.

The wind had abated somewhat of the loudness of its clamour, but what it had lost in fury, it had gained in biting spite.

The firs and spruces around Mary Bayliss's house looked blacker, the grey clouds darker and colder than ever, the very ground seemed suffering actual pain from the long, dreary winter when the widow opened her eyes to a day-light that had grown hateful to her and her heart to a fresh sense of calamity.

“Those girls; Those girls! How they are coughing!” she said.

The stone walls of her house were thick,

but yet she could hear that sound, and it smote not only her heart but her conscience.

“Ah! If I could only feel that I was not hurting my girls, the rest would matter little!” she sighed. She was afraid that all that long, dreary winter their clothing had not been warm enough, that she had made them live more hardly than girls used to home comforts could well bear.

“I wonder if that little calf is still alive?” she went on. “I can’t understand how it is that all our stock dies! The animals, at any rate, never have to go without, whatever we may do; I can’t blame myself for that; and yet they die! I can’t understand it! I shall get rid of McQuade.”

The widow made a hasty toilet, put on a weather-beaten hat, heavily trimmed with crape, wrapped her late husband’s shepherd plaid tightly round her, and went into the hall, where her only serving maid, Janet, was already at work; unbolted the door, drawing her veil closely over her face as the deadly east wind cut her.

From the little plateau above the Birren, upon which Cauldknowe stood, all looked bleak and bare as desolation itself. There was a chill blackness in the grey atmosphere, depressing enough to the strongest and hap-

piest, that seemed to Mary Bayliss, laden with despair and death.

For one moment she paused before the closed windows by which the Captain had stood lost in admiration on that fatally lovely autumn day more than four years ago. The refined domesticity was all gone now. The smooth, green sward where the children had played was unshorn and knotty ; the broad, grey drive covered with stunted weeds ; the firs and spruces black and funereal ; the river tearing wildly down to the Solway with a roar that reminded the town-born woman of the roar of London at mid-day, and for an instant took her back to her childhood's home.

Only for a moment did she pause to note the desolation of everything around, and then she set off at a brisk rate towards the farm, which lay on the other side of the road.

“ Everything wants doing ! Give it up ? No, I’d die sooner ! ” she said, as she hurried past the untended gardens beside the rhododendron banks. “ What’s the use of living without this place, which cost my precious one his life ? ” Then she heard, in fancy, the girls’ coughs, and a horrible dread crept into her heart and chilled it. “ What, if I kill my girls in the struggle ? Myself ? — that’s

nothing. I'd gladly sacrifice myself and all I have ; but my girls—my girls ! Oh, they make me so anxious, they are not fit for hardships ? But I couldn't tear myself away from here ! ” and she crossed the dry, hard road to the Knowe Farm.

In the meanwhile the girls had risen, had put on each an old black serge dress, a small shawl of black and red plaid, and had gone into the kitchen to see about breakfast, Janet, the maid, being highly incompetent except for the roughest work. She had, however, made up a good fire, put on the kettle, cleaned the “girdle,” and made the place look tolerably tidy.

“ Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-o-o-o ! ” said Jessie, in a succession of syllables like demi-semiquavers, shivering as she spoke. “ Well, Alie, there’s just a splendid fire, at any rate ; and that’s the best thing we’ve seen this morning.”

“ We’ll have a good burn to begin with,” said Alison, coughing. And the two girls knelt down side by side in front of the fire.

“ Poor mother,” said Alison, “ what a morning for her to turn out upon. I do wish she wouldn’t ! I wonder if the wee calf’s dead ? ”

“ Of course it is,” said Jessie, spreading out

both hands to the blaze, “don’t our calves always die; but?”—turning round suddenly—“oh bliss! What do I see—one, two, three, four eggs on the dresser! You don’t mean to say we can have one each for breakfast! What unheard-off luxury!”

“Ah, that’s grand,” said Alison. “Then we need not trouble about making porridge, and I feel very lazy this morning. I”—then she coughed again—“I wish I could get rid of this cold, it makes me so stupid.”

“You would get up, you know! You made me stay in bed and be waited upon when my cold was bad. Well this won’t do! We shan’t have breakfast ready by the time Auntie comes in, if we don’t make a move. It’s my turn to scone this morning—you coffee—I’ll scone.” Jessie had an airy way of using nouns as verbs, but no doubt you can understand her.

Leaving her cousin in possession of the whole of the front of the fire Jessie, who, now she was warm, felt well and brisk, went about the kitchen, the heels of her shoes clattering merrily over the red stone floor, collected buttermilk, flour, and soda, put the broad girdle on the fire to get hot, and set to work to make the scones for breakfast.

It was a pretty sight to see Jessie at the

pastry board. The fact is, that Jessie was herself, at any time, a pretty girl to see. She was just sufficiently tall to be graceful, well grown, with a pliant young figure, that looked charming anywhere. Her black serge—old, indeed, and a good deal rubbed about the sleeves—fitted her closely. It was the work of a local dressmaker, but Jessie herself had altered and altered it until now, in its old age, it was really a creditable fit. Her little red plaid shawl was pinned neatly over her shoulders. Her bright brown hair was crisply waved, by nature, to a certain extent. but in this case nature had been liberally assisted by art, for no amount of cold or sleepiness would have prevented Jessie from crimping her hair over night. Her face was a delicate oval—perhaps just the least in the world too narrow, with a straight, slender nose; her rosy lips parted, on the slightest provocation, in a smile that showed their perfect drawing, and her large, bright eyes were of a liquid beauty that would have made even plain features attractive. These eyes had a little trick difficult to define. They suddenly laughed with mirth or clouded with sadness.

Jessie was neat-handed, too, about her household work; and that gift, which is so very charming in any girl, is quite irresistible in a

pretty one. To see her deftly mix up those scones, to see her roll them out and neatly cut them into shape was, thought Alison, who, like everyone else, adored Jessie, a sight at any time worth the seeing, and she turned from the fire to watch her cousin with unalloyed admiration. Isn't it charming to see girls admire one another?

"I wish I could do things as nicely as you do," sighed Alison from the fender.

"So you do, and a great deal better," returned Jessie, from the table, stamping out, as she spoke, a scone with an inverted tumbler the cutter proper being broken or lost; "besides which, my dear child, you are a talented authoress, and I'm a mere nobody! Look here, Alie, as you're not well, I'll make the coffee and you sit there and turn the scones."

"All right," said Alison, thankful to be able to keep near the fire. "The girdle's just splendid."

So Jessie put the scones on the hot iron girdle, and giving Alison a knife to turn them with, remarked :

"Here, talented authoress; and don't do the King Alfred business! Don't let my cakes burn while you are dreaming about 'Our Border Towers.'"

Alison laughed and actually blushed.

"No, I'll be very careful," she said, "and I wonder, I wonder—when my paper will be out. I'm thinking of another——"

"Oh, please wait till those things are cooked," said Jessie, measuring out the coffee. "We're just through with coffee, I'm sorry to see. I do so hate having to tell Auntie; I hope McQuade will be able to go and fetch up the coals to-day, or we shan't have enough for to-morrow, and Janet's been lavish this morning."

"I really must do something——" said Alison, with a tinge of pain quite audible in her voice.

"But they won't pay you," interrupted Jessie.

"But it leads to something; one must make a beginning. Don't you think a paper on 'Bruce and the Royal Burgh of Annan' would be interesting?"

"Not to me; I never wish to hear his name again. I am sick and tired of him; go in for a novel, Alie."

"Ah! but you see I haven't a light hand," said Alison, pensively, turning a puffy scone as she spoke. The want of "lightness" must have been metaphorical, that scone was turned easily enough.

“ Well, I must say at present you’re a trifle heavy ; then I never was an antiquary, so of course I can’t be expected to care for such dry-as-dust subjects as you take up ; and it’s difficult for me to imagine other people liking what I don’t like ; but——”

“ but what ? ” asked Alison, eagerly.

“ The scones are burning ! ” cried Jessie.

“ No, no, I’ve saved them ! —but what were you going to say ? ”

“ Why, I was going to say you’ve a most admirable heroine all ready for use,” returned Jessie.

“ Who ? —Fair Helen of Kirkconnel ? ” asked Alison.

“ Fair fiddlesticks ! Me, of course, you old bat ! ” exclaimed Jessie, with ungrammatical energy, facing her cousin suddenly with her pretty figure at its tallest, and her eyes twinkling with mirth.

“ You ? ” asked Alison, looking up at Jessie from the fender, with a curious mixture of earnest enquiry and amusement. “ You—why you’re not an historical personage ! ”

“ Na-a ! ” said Jessie, suddenly breaking into the Birrendale accent ; “ but I’m an aaful pretty gaerl ! ” and her eyes, always bright, sparkled with fun.

“ Pretty ? Pretty good looking ! ” laughed

Alison. “Do you think three volumes devoted to a description of your mediocre charms would be any lighter reading than ‘Our Border Towers?’ But are you going to boil the eggs or must I? There, the scones are done to a turn!” and Alison stood the flowery cakes up on end on the table.

“Heaven and earth! What a thing it is to have no invention,” exclaimed Jessie. (“I’ll do the eggs, don’t you move.) But that’s the curiousness of every thing! I have heaps of invention but I can’t write; you can write but where’s your invention? Now I’ve seen myself the heroine of at least a dozen novels. You know I’m in my own mind always the centre of a little drama, and always have been as long as I can remember anything. What is the use of being—well, yes, I will say it—an exceptionally pretty girl, and an orphan—orphans are always interesting—if one can’t——”

“If one can’t flirt with Mac Carrutherses or the poker, or the boy Baird,” put in Alison, drily.

“A severe old maid at twenty, that’s what you are, Alie! Come, there’s Auntie frozen to death, I’m sure. Let’s get the breakfast in at once.”

They found Mrs. Bayliss crouching over the dining-room fire, the picture of woe.

"Oh, the last little calf's dead!" she exclaimed as soon as she heard the girls' footsteps; "all our stock dies; everything's a failure! Alie, my darling child, how you coughed in the night! why did you get up?"

"I think my cold's a little better this morning, mother, and I've just had a good burn by the kitchen fire; don't worry about me. I shall be all right as soon as the wind changes."

"When it changes! That won't be till everything is utterly ruined," said the widow, bitterly. "Give me some coffee. I'm half dead; the wind this morning is positively fiendish!"

"Mother!" said Alison, with a sad and tender reproof in her voice.

"Very wrong, my dear, I dare say; but I'm too wretched to be orthodox," retorted Mary, sharply. She had been thinking of the fast-dwindling borrowed money as well as of the dead calf.

The girls could not talk when Mary looked so miserable. As a rule there were no letters nor papers to bring a current of fresh life from the great world; it was woefully dull.

They turned to the table and took their

breakfast in silence, feeling that another dreary day was before them.

“Mother, you’ll be able to spare McQuade to fetch up the coals from Kirkhope this morning Alison presently ventured to ask, but she put the question rather timidly.

“I can’t possibly spare him to-day, and the cart’s wanted on the farm,” said Mrs. Bayliss.

“But we’ve hardly any left,” said Alison, “we shan’t be able to cook to-morrow.”

“You must make them do; I can’t spare him to-day. I’ll send him down to-morrow as early as I can.”

“We wanted him to bring several things up with him,” put in Jessie. “We want coffee, and——”

“Everything, I suppose,” said Mrs. Bayliss, grimly. “For to-day, you must manage with what you have. There’s always one resource left; *one can always go without.*”

The girls said no more; but the little spark of cheerfulness that the warmth and business of the kitchen had given them was effectually quenched. Perpetual going without, unless to the most heroic minds, is a very depressing process, especially when a bitter east wind is blowing.

“And it’s quite possible to go without once

too often," said Jessie, nerved to boldness by the thought of Alison's cold.

" You are in the conspiracy then, I suppose, Jessie," said Mrs. Bayliss with some temper.

" Conspiracy, aunt! what conspiracy can be hidden in wanting coals and coffee!"

" Read that," said Mrs. Bayliss, drawing John Harbuckle's letter out of her pocket, and throwing it on the table as if it had been a bill with a demand for immediate payment.

" From uncle John!" exclaimed both the girls, trying to seize the letter as they spoke; " how delightful to see his handwriting again!"

The postman had given it to Mrs. Bayliss at the farm.

In the early days of the Captain's occupancy of Cauldknowe there had been a lodge-keeper and a post bag; now the letters were left at the farm, which was close to the road, as the man could not go up the long drive.

Mrs. Bayliss had been on the point of returning home when the man had given her John Harbuckle's letter.

She had looked at the address and recognised the hand, read it, and, as if in anger, thrust it into her pocket and hurried home through a chilling fall of sleet, her husband's plaid wrapped closely round her, her battered crape

hat tied down by her widow's veil. One could not see her face, but her step was agitated and uneven.

"He means to get us away if he can by any means!" she had said to herself as she hurried along. "To take me away from my husband's grave and from all that reminds me of him! How is it possible I could live anywhere else? But John can't know, how should he? how I cling to every stick and stone that my poor darling's eyes once rested upon. Ah, there's that araucaria he moved just before his accident, the last tree he ever touched—that's dying, like everything else! But how can I leave it! How can I?"

She felt half-choked with grief as she stopped a moment and looked at a "monkey puzzler" that had turned brown from want of nourishment, and her face grew furrowed, and tears filled her eyes.

She went on again through the sleet with a foreboding in her heart that the letter she had crushed into her pocket meant change; and a resolute determination to be cut to pieces by inches sooner than yield formed rapidly in her mind.

"What a long while it is since he has written!" said Alison, to whose share the letter fell at last.

Ah, my dear, widows and orphans are rarely over-burdened with letters from any one!" said Mrs. Bayliss, acidly; "read it aloud, Alison. You're smiling—but I can assure you, with me it's no smiling matter."

Alison tried to look serious; but the little remark under the address had tickled her fancy; however she began to read—

"Trinity Square,

"Tower Hill, S.E.

(“Undoubtedly the finest square in the world.)

"MY DEAREST MARY,"

(“Humph! How very affectionate all at once!” interpolated the widow. “He has generally been quite content with plain ‘dear.’”)

“Oh, it doesn’t mean you’re his ‘dearest altogether,’ Auntie,” Jessie hastened to explain, her spirits rising at the sight of the letter; “but that you’re the ‘dearest *Mary*’ he possesses. Go on please, Alison, I’m dying to hear that letter.”)

“My dearest Mary,” Alison recommenced, “I have been hoping to hear from you and the girls, for some considerable time past; but as you all seem to have forgotten my existence, I now take the liberty of reminding you that I am still alive, and, to tell the truth, more than a little perplexed by a domestic problem

that appears to me exceedingly difficult of solution, except upon an hypothesis that I shrink from entertaining."

("Does that mean he's going to get married at last? There's no depending on the most confirmed old bachelors!" threw in Jessie.

"This is a serious subject," said Mrs. Bayliss, knitting her brows, and then continuing to read, Alison went on.)

"Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, the excellent people who look after me and my house, are, I have every reason to believe, a most respectable and conscientious couple; how then does it come about that my household expenditure now is exactly double what it used to be in our dear mother's time? I might be willing, or rather, I could perhaps bring myself to believe, that it takes more to keep one person than it does to keep two, but I fail to understand why it should cost double as much. It is true that Mrs. Robbins is a most admirable cook, and, as one of the later Greek poets hath it—'Among the philosophers I place a cook.' I admit most cheerfully Mrs. Robbins's talent in this important particular, and I am willing to allow her scope for the exercise of that talent; but still, it seems to me that my daily *menu*, after all, does not warrant the exorbitant—not to put too fine a point upon it—

the exorbitant demands that are perpetually being made upon my purse; especially when I take into consideration the fact that I am fond of prowling about Billingsgate and Leadenhall Markets, and of choosing the particular little bit I happen to fancy, for which I invariably pay at the time.

“The fact is, my dearest Mary, I am beginning to realise, by painful, and, I must add, costly experience, that there are subjects with which the masculine mind, unless it has received a specific training, is unable to cope. I mean, that unless a man has been a purser, or something of the sort, he wants a feminine relative to look after the details of his house-keeping, or he finds himself veering towards an hypothesis, that, if in the case of such a highly respectable and conscientious couple as Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, he will naturally shrink from entertaining for a moment.

“Mary, my dear girl, I have been wandering about our old home to-night and find it full of emptiness and the memories of other times. I have a sister and two nieces (for I am sure your Jessie will let me be her Uncle John), and as I have wandered about among my old furniture (I have some really fine examples, I assure you), in my mind’s eye I have seen many very pretty pictures, of

course containing feminine figures, without which there can never be a picture worth looking at, as most artists will admit. I know how fondly you cling to your present home. I do not blame you; I, too, sometimes—indeed, often—take a turn or two through Catherine Court, or the Tower Gardens, so I will not urge you to come here against your own feelings; but might it not be an advantage to the girls? The little bird in the air that carries news informs me that Alison has written a good paper on ‘Our Border Towers.’ I cannot tell you how gratified I am to find her taking such an interest in local antiquities. She would find herself here, upon Tower Hill, in the very midst of the History of England, and would be of invaluable assistance to me, as it is impossible for a business man like myself to spend hours in the Guildhall Library or the British Museum. I believe, in fact, that were you and the girls with me I should take a new lease of life; so, if possible, come.

“ If you really can make up your mind to take me and my purse out of the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Robbins (by which a great pecuniary saving will be effected), I will come to Birrendale for a few days and put things straight for you. Have you ever thought of letting Cauldknowe furnished? That would

remove the necessity for your leaving the place altogether, and as there is such good fishing in the Birren you would have little difficulty in securing a tenant at once, if you were willing to accept a reasonable rent.

“ Think this over, and let me know your decision as soon as possible. I shall look for it anxiously. In the meantime believe me, my dearest Mary, with much love to yourself and the girls,

“ Your most affectionate brother,  
“ JOHN HARBUCKLE.”

“ What a dear letter! Why who can have told him of my paper!” exclaimed Alison, as she ceased reading. And with her grey eyes beaming with pleasure and her whole face animated she looked almost, if not quite, a pretty girl.

Alison was not as Jessie was, a girl everyone admired. She never struck people at once: indeed her face so varied with her thoughts and feelings that one could hardly say what she was like. When she was dull, she looked almost, if not quite, plain, when pleased almost, if not altogether, pretty. She had good grey eyes, dark brown hair, a small, very well shaped, compact little head, and wild irregular features, that contrasted rather strangely with her ordinary sedate manner.

She wore just the same kind of old black serge as Jessie, but she did not look so neat and trim in it. Her shawl was pinned awry, her abundant hair which had not the trace of a wave in it, had been brushed back as smoothly as satin when she left her room, but had managed to get rough and out of order by this time. She looked like an odd mixture of a wild mountain girl, a blue-stocking, a Puritan maiden, and a bright-eyed, inquisitive terrier ; just now, particularly like this last.

“ Oh, mother, how charming to live on Tower Hill ! I can imagine nothing more delightful,” cried Alison ; “ I remember going to see grandmother there years ago. It’s been in my mind ever since. I’ve often wondered why Sir Walter never went to live on Tower Hill ! ”

“ All the better for you, Alison,” put in Jessie ; “ you can write his London novels for him, you know ! But, oh Auntie, if you’ll only say you’ll take us to London I’ll jump right over the top of the house this very instant minute ! That letter opens up a most lovely, heavenly vision ; do, do, there’s a good kind Auntie, do let us go ! ”

Jessie clasping her hands, which were round and pretty, if rather red, and turning her bright eyes eagerly to her aunt, compelled

a smile even from Mrs. Bayliss, who was, it must be confessed, seldom quite unmoved by Jessie's charms

"You're going to let us go, aren't you?" continued Jessie, strengthening the effect of her clasped hands and brilliant eyes, as she noticed that she had already made some impression upon her aunt.

But there, I am afraid she just over-shot the mark, and aroused Mrs. Bayliss to the fact that Jessie was actually attacking her known objections to leaving Cauldknowe.

Mrs. Bayliss, acting on the defensive, crushed back the smile that, unbidden, had slightly curved her lips and drew her mouth down at the corners again.

"What, leave your poor uncle in his grave, Jessie?" she asked, reproachfully.

"Mother dear, Heaven is as near to London as it is to Birrendale," said Alison, gently.

"Yes, yes, but still"—and her voice gave way suddenly, "you can't, you can't know, children, you can't possibly know!" and, not liking to cry before the girls, she went off to her own cold room and locked herself in with her grief.

The girls looked after her in silence and dismay as she hurried from them. They were used to these outbursts of tears, but each one

made them feel sadder than the last had done.

“Poor Mammie!” sighed Alison, “ah me!” Then there was another silence during which Alison put the breakfast things together on a tray.

“I wonder sometimes,” she said presently, under her voice, as she took off the crumbs with the scoop, “I wonder sometimes if any other man was ever so deeply mourned as my father is.”

“Mine!” said Jessie, in the same undertone. “My father’s death killed my mother. I shall never forget how she looked all the time from the day she heard of that wreck until she died. Although I was quite a child then, I shall always see her face as it was during those dreadful months. Poor darling mother, how sweet she was! How good, too good for this rough world! Oh, Alison, do you know she came to me last night, and smiled! I was so thankful! It made me feel so strangely happy! She smiled again, think of that! And so gently and happily! Perhaps it means something! Can it be an omen of good? There is to be an end to all this wretchedness perhaps? Oh, how I hope so! Stop a minute, Alie, don’t ring the bell just yet,” and she drew up her chair to the fire and put on another log. “What does that.

mean about Catherine Court and the Tower Gardens in uncle John's letter? I don't quite see what that allusion refers to, and yet—and yet"—she paused as if trying to catch some fleeting memory—"the names recall something to my mind. Ah!" suddenly brightening, "I remember! Mother used to speak of them a long while ago, when I was very little, but not much afterwards."

"Don't you know she used to live there when she was a girl?" said Alison, who had taken up her favourite position on the corner of the low stone wall that bounded the tiled hearth. Her cold was much better, but she was a long way from well.

"I knew she had stayed there, but I didn't know it was her home," said Jessie.

"Oh, yes it was. She and my mother lived quite near each other, and used to play in the Tower Gardens when they were children. Your mother was younger than mine and everybody's pet."

"Ah! like her daughter!" said Jessie, with a faint attempt at mirthfulness.

"Everybody's pet," continued Alison; "but I fancy, although I've never been told very distinctly, that she was—that is, that uncle John, who of course was young once the same as other people, liked her very much indeed;

only, you see, my father happening to have a brother, almost as fascinating——”

“ Not almost—quite,” said Jessie.

“ Well, we know what we mean, don’t we? I can’t tell you exactly how it was. Mother isn’t proud of being a citizeness; she never cares to talk about it. It’s a pity, because the City of London would interest me so very much more than any other place in the world. But now, about this letter! It will have to be answered. Dear uncle John! when an ingenuous man attempts to be wily how transparent he is! Of course he knows how wretched we are here and he wants to help us. You’d like to go to London, I suppose?”

Jessie clasped her head as if to keep her crinkly hair from flying off with amazement that Alison should have asked such a question.

“ Go! Why I’d crawl there on my knees if I couldn’t get there any other way! London! the idea of living there is simple bliss after our late experience! The idea of seeing people—of being in a place where there are people, is so delicious!”

“ So I think,” said Alison. “ And Tower Hill—the City—what a field for research!”

“ What a field for living instead of existing!” said Jessie. “ But what about Auntie? How can we make her listen to reason, if, as soon as

we allude to the subject, she goes and shuts herself up and cries?"

"Jessie," said Alison, gravely, "she must go."

"You mean, if she doesn't go, she will, one day, be turned out," said Jessie, with a sort of dryness that with her indicated mental pain.

Alison slowly bent her head in assent.

"Now we've this opening before us, we musn't let that happen, must we?" she said, after a momentary pause. "Now, it would be cruel to let it happen; and we've no right to ask uncle John to throw away any more of his money. Besides, I'm sure he wouldn't do it; why should he? No, we must go. If mother refuses uncle John's offer, I shall write on my own responsibility and tell him exactly how things stand. We're now just living—no, I won't call it living—we're just barely existing on as little of the money mother borrowed as will keep our bodies and souls together, and the rest goes to that devouring farm. I dread tearing mother away, but it will have to be done, Jessie. And when the wrench is over it will be better for her, and—she's coining; let us run off and get our room done, before we discuss it with her—come at once; she won't care to see us just now."

And ringing the bell for Janet to clear away,

the two girls went off to make their own beds and dust at their room, while Mrs. Bayliss went to the kitchen, and interviewed one Edward Irving, a labourer from the farm, who had been sent up to the house for a good many things he was not at all likely to get.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CAPTAIN'S LAST GREAT WORK.

THE girls having arranged their own room, went to Mrs. Bayliss's, where Alison was much moved on observing that the quilt, by the side of which her mother had evidently been kneeling, was still impressed with the form of her head and wet with her tears.

Allison made no remark about it to Jessie, but wondered sorrowfully to what decision her mother had come. Was she still clinging with heroic folly to her ruin or had she come at the still more heroic determination of yielding for the sake of her girls?

Many little things about the room had been recently moved. She must again have been inspecting her husband's relics and asking, as it were, counsel of his watch and of the covers of his favourite books.

There was no upstairs to this Birrendale house. The bedrooms ran out from a corridor leading to the entrance hall, on the opposite

side of which were the dining-room and the drawing-room; this last-named being that fatal apartment by whose open windows the poor Captain had stood drinking tea out of the cups with the heather pattern, and wondering at the loveliness of the wooded banks of the rapid stream as seen though a cunningly contrived vista.

That room had been shut up now for many months. The few visitors that called were received in what had become the one and only living-room. Great, therefore, was the surprise when the two girls, coming from their household work, noticed that the drawing-room door stood ajar and that a stream of cold grey light was issuing therefrom, falling upon a trophy in the hall that the Captain had made of the weapons he had collected during his foreign service.

In that house the memorials of the late Captain were everywhere.

"Can any one have called?" whispered Alison; "you're tidy, go into the drawing-room and find out."

Alison, poor girl, was perpetually haunted by a feeling that she was terribly untidy. Certainly she was not so trim and neat as Jessie, but very untidy she rarely looked to other eyes than her own.

"I don't think there can be anyone so early," said Jessie. "I'll just peep in," and she cautiously pushed open the door.

The shutters were thrown wide open, but Mrs. Bayliss was the only person in the room, and she was standing lost in mournful thought before an easel, gazing at her husband's latest work of art.

Jessie stepped back into the hall.

"There's no one there except Auntie. She's looking at poor uncle's pictures," she said, under her voice. "Let's go into the dining-room, I'm frozen."

"No, no, let's go to her! she's been alone long enough," returned Alison in a hurried and anxious whisper. "Come, dear!"

And she quietly crossed the room and stood with Jessie behind her mother, and, without a word from any of them, looked at her father's last work; the widow only indicating that she was aware of their presence by a slight movement of her eyes from the portrait on the easel to a small pencil sketch of a young man's head that she held in her hand.

It was a pathetic little group, the widow in her shabby crape, the girls in the worn serges, with the one touch of brightness in their little shawls. They all stood so still and sad; so sorrowful with loss, so anxious for the future.

Pathetic—yes—but dare I describe the relic before whose shrine they stood?

It was that unfinished portrait of his wife of which Captain Bayliss had once spoken to his friend Major Johnstone, and which he had declared everyone had recognized as “a striking likeness.”

“A striking likeness!” Heaven forbid that any woman anywhere in all the world should be like that unspeakable thing! The mouth!—one’s blood curdles to think of that mouth; of those livid eyes, so ghoul-like in expression.

It was appallingly awful and infra-human, yet, horror of horrors! it bore a hideous resemblance to the broken-hearted woman standing before it. You could tell it was meant for her.

It was colossal in size. Had there been a body of like proportion it must have risen—ugh! I shudder as I imagine that hideous form rising—growing like the poodle does in Faust—until it reached the ceiling, and then pushing—for there was force enough in the huge muscles of that unclothed neck to push through anything—through the roof and impiously facing the grey sky overhead. Oh! that head and bust! It was a thing to haunt you for ever if you once saw it!

And here, of course, I am supposing that you had eyes to see it. Mary Bayliss had not, or I doubt whether even she would have been devoted enough to her husband's memory to have exhibited such a horror in her own drawing-room as "a portrait of herself."

She was, however, dimly aware that it was not lovely, but she excused that on the ground of its unfinished condition. What she did know, what was burnt into her heart, was the fact it had been worked at in those happy, happy days, that sweet second honey-moon, when she and her Captain had first come to Birrendale. Alas for those days! where were they now? Gone with the frail meadow-sweet the girls had picked down by the still salmon pool on those delicious autumn evenings, when he and she used to read and talk together! Gone, all gone; but this—this work of his, this evidence of his love for her—this remained! Her portrait was his last attempt at art.

After the three had stood before this precious relic for a few seconds, which seemed quite a long while to the girls, Mary went to the window and carefully examined the sketch she had been holding in her hand.

"Jessie, come here darling," she presently said, in a gentle, tearful voice.

Jessie went to her, feeling very much as if

she were in a mortuary chapel, listening to the burial service.

"Yes, Auntie, dear?" she asked, under her voice.

"You have not seen this before, love."

It was a slight pencil drawing of a young man, with a large frontal development, and very small features. It must have been done many years ago, the paper was quite discoloured. Under the portrait was written, in Mary's hand:

"Poor Arthur—my dearest James's first portrait."

"Your father, Jessie."

"Yes," said Jessie; but her tone implied, "I don't recognise it in the least."

"Taken many years before you can remember, dear. Your poor mother prized it fondly. I am going to give it to you, darling, pray be very, very careful of it. Here, Jessie."

"Thank you, Auntie," said Jessie, kissing Mary with a little clinging action, to which the widow responded by folding the girl in her arms.

"My darling, almost with his last breath, said, 'You'll always be kind to poor Arthur's Jessie,'" she sighed. "I hope I'm good to you, my dear?" stroking the girl's hair.

"Oh, Auntie! how can you ask?" murmured Jessie.

"Alison, love, I've been selfish, my grief has made me forget you," said Mary, turning to her daughter. "No, dear, not forget you; but I've thought, perhaps too much, that you were only mine; I ought, perhaps, to have remembered—to have thought more that you were his—a sacred trust left by him."

"Dearest mother," said Alison, the tears rushing into her own eyes, "we know—we know a little how hard it must be for you to leave this place. But you will let us go to London, won't you?"

"Don't press me, child! I'll write. I'll write to uncle John and ask him to come here—I'll try to make him understand, if I can; but how can he know what I feel? What sympathy can there be between us? How am I to live away from here? But I'll try to write—I'll try to make him understand."

Without another word she turned abruptly and went into the dining-room, took several sheets of Alison's scribbling paper, and began to write.

Mrs. Bayliss, sitting writing at the table, looked singularly unattractive. She had, of course, taken off her hat, but she had not yet

given herself the trouble to put on the cap, and collar and wristbands she generally wore. What was the use? she would have probably to go out about the ground "the policy," as they called it there, or over to the farm many times yet before evening.

Mary Harbuckle at four years of age had been a miracle of fair, childish beauty; at eighteen rather a pretty girl. Mary Bayliss at thirty had been a tolerably good-looking young matron (she had in fact been greatly admired both at "Gib" and at Malta when she and the Captain had been quartered at those places); but now, at forty-six, her hair, without gaining the dignity of grey, had lost its colour and was very thin; what little remained of it was so tightly drawn off her face, and brushed so closely to her head, that it was almost as if she were bald; which effect was heightened by her colourless eye-brows and lashes, and the general hard, shiny pinkness of her whole complexion, that constant exposure to rough weather, as well as years, had sadly scarred and dried.

As she wrote, the corners of her mouth, the most expressive part of her face, told of desolating grief. Her grief was now her one luxury in life, she hugged it to her, almost as if it had worn some visible form, and with a

dogged resolution that nothing should separate her from it. James Bayliss's widow was a very different woman from James Bayliss's wife ; there may, indeed, always have been the same admixture in her character, but what had once been weak was strong now, and what had in other days been most prominent had receded ; she was an entirely changed woman.

Not many minutes did she sit there. The man, McQuade, soon came over to sow the peas which should have been in the ground some weeks ago. Mary went out with him, and stood in the bitter wind, wrangling about the best place for them for some time, then came back, tore up the elaborate epistle to her brother she had already composed, and began the first draft of another.

When her mother left the drawing room, Alison went up to the window to close the shutter.

Jessie followed her. For a moment they both stood looking out at the cold grey day.

“ Alison ! you must take me away, dear ! ” said Jessie, very miserably, laying her head on Alison’s shoulder as she spoke. “ You will take me away, won’t you ? ” she continued, dropping into a half-childish whine. “ Alie, you won’t let me be thrown to the wolves ? ”

“I can’t bear to have to fight her!” returned Alison.

“We can’t stay here and be killed! and all for nothing too,” exclaimed Jessie.

“Never mind, darling, we’ll go! We *will* go. I will, I must take you away. I won’t have you killed.”

“Because I shall be very soon,” said Jessie, with a pathetic simplicity like a sick child’s.

“Come, don’t let us freeze in here any longer. There’s the dinner to see after,” said Alison, bravely, but stooping to kiss Jessie’s hair as she spoke.

“Dinner! I don’t believe there is any!” said Jessie, as if much inclined to cry.

“At any rate, we’d better arrange what there is,” said Alison. “Let’s be off, dear.”

So they went into the kitchen, where they were at least warm and busy for an hour or so.

Presently they went to their own room to “sort themselves,” as Janet would put it; “tidy themselves” an English Sarah or Mary Ann might use as an equivalent.

But scarcely had they entered the room when Jessie gave a sudden start.

“Hark!” she exclaimed, “what’s that!” and she stood still as stone, her bright eyes eager with listening, her sweet lips parted and fixed.

“ It’s only McQuade with the cart,” said Alison, calmly.

Jessie darted to the window.

“ Oh ! ” she cried with a thrill of the wildest joy in her voice, and a sudden fervent clap of her hands, “ oh ! it is—it is—it’s Mac—it’s Mac Carruthers ! ”

## CHAPTER VIII.

MAC CARRUTHERS.

**A**RT is irrepressible.

The Moorish followers of the Prophet, forbidden to adorn the walls of their mosques with figures, found room for the exercise of their artistic talents in elaborate arabesques : the lower orders of the Birrendale people display *their* artistic ingenuity on their door-steps.

Janet, having “redded” the step in front of Mrs. Bayliss’s house, had carefully ornamented it with a device of many wavy lines, sharp ziz-zags, and irregular dots, boldly done in whiting

It was the one and only effort in pictorial art of which she was capable, and ought therefore to be treated with consideration ; such efforts may be seen in any street on any Saturday afternoon in any Birrendale village.

When Mrs. Bayliss had cared how her house looked she had forbidden this display of talent ; now she was too indifferent to notice it.

On this red step, with its grotesque ornamentation, Mr. Malcolm Carruthers, having rung the bell, the brass knob of which Janet had lately been rubbing up with the tenderest care, the door-step and bell-knob being almost the only things belonging to the house in which she took any deep interest ; on this red step, I repeat, Mr. Malcolm Carruthers, having rung the bell, stood in the bitter east wind, awaiting the opening of the door.

Malcolm Carruthers was a young man of twenty-four or thereabouts, who might be called either a Scotch-Englishman or an Anglo-Indian Scotchman ; his father and himself having been born in India, their paternal relatives being Scotch, their maternal English.

Carruthers is a distinctly Border name, as common in Birrendale as Robinson in London. It has belonged to the locality from time immemorial and is said to be of Ancient British origin ; indeed, as Mac himself often said : “ My uncle traces back the family miles and miles beyond the Deluge ; so no doubt Mac Carruthers owned an ancestry as much given to getting hanged at bonnie Carlisle as any young man who ever lived in the now most respectable and decorous old “ reaving land.”

Mac’s uncle, with whom he was then living,

was a distinguished man in his county, no other, in fact, than Alexander Carruthers, Esq., the Laird of Muirhead, a considerable property a few miles from Cauldknowe; but Mac himself was by no means a remarkable person, except in the eyes of Jessie Carruthers and in those of his cousin, Alec, the only son of the Laird, with whom Mac was as grand an hero as any in a Border ballad. You might have passed Mac in the street without notice.

He was, however, a strongly built if not very finely finished young fellow. There was also a certain good-humoured kindness about his blunt features, and (as in the case of Jessie) on the slightest provocation, a merry, merry twinkle in his rather small eyes.

As he stood on that red-ochred door step, his expression was at that moment more suggestive of having faced a biting east wind than anything else; his natural beauty, never much at any time, was a good deal impaired just now by the redness of all the prominences of his face. He was buttoned up to the chin in a thick but very short riding jacket, and he held in his hand his hunting crop and his horse's bridle. His face was not towards the door, but towards his horse, to which he from time to time addressed observations not always of a complimentary

nature ; and this, not because he was angry with the creature, but because he was feeling excessively nervous.

It was seldom that Mac felt nervous, but there are circumstances that upset the strongest of us.

The fact was, that Mac had not seen Jessie Bayliss for nearly five months.

Would Mac Carruthers then have been prepared to state solemnly that he was desperately in love with Jessie ?

I am not sure he would. Certain it is that as he waited there—and they kept him it seemed a most unmerciful time—he felt over-excited, but not to the extent of losing his self-possession.

Now Jessie, as soon as she was sure that it was indeed Mac who was trotting up the avenue on his cousin's bay, delighted, overjoyed, as she was, was still capable of grappling with the urgent practical difficulty that arose at once.

“ Alie ! who’s to open the door ? Janet’s just one coal by this time. You must go ! Make haste—he’s ringing ! ”

“ No, no,” said Alison, “ you’re tidier than I am.”

“ I will *not*,” said Jessie, stamping her foot. “ Go at once ! Will you go ? Oh, make haste ! ”

"But I'm not fit to be seen! Look at my sleeves?" said Alison.

"Yes, yes, you are—besides——"

"Besides, no one ever sees me, so it doesn't matter!" said Alison, as if finishing Jessie's sentence; and off she hurried, calling back as she went,

"Alas! Alas! for the boy Baird, and the hundred and fifty others!"

"Don't let him go! Mind you don't let him go! I'll be down directly!" Jessie called after her; tearing open a drawer, and beginning a frantic search for her neatest collar and cuffs.

"Mrs. Bayliss is at---?" Mac Carruthers asked, turning round sharply as the door was opened; then recognizing Alison he stopped short, made a hurried grasp at his hat, succeeded in raising it a long way from his head, and went on:

"How do you do, Miss Bayliss? I'm afraid I've come over at an unconscionably early hour."

"Not at all," said Alison with a certain easy dignity, and apparently no more disconcerted than if she had met him in the drawing-room in a proper way.

"Not at all. Won't you come in? Mother is at home, she will be very pleased to see

you. I think Mc Quade is somewhere about ; he'll take your horse. I'll send Janet to look for him."

"Thanks, but I mustn't stay five minutes. They won't wait lunch for me ; but they'll expect me to be in to time. It was about those two rods, I wanted to see Mrs. Bayliss. She hasn't let them I hope?"

"I don't quite know," said Alison. "The Johnstones will be needing them, I think. But come in ; that is, wait one moment till I fetch Janet. Oh, here's McQuade from the farm ! I'll tell mother you're here, if you won't mind waiting for one instant," she turned quickly and went into the dining-room, where she found her mother still in the agonies of composition.

Mrs. Bayliss raised a flushed face to Alison.

"It's Mac Carruthers, mother," said Alison, in a half whisper, going up to Mrs. Bayliss's chair. "He's come to know about the fishing."

"Dear, dear, what a nuisance ! Open the drawing-room shutters and let him go in there."

"Oh, let him come here, mother," pleaded Alison, "never mind the papers."

"Well, bring him in then. I suppose nothing matters now," said Mary, ungraciously.

"It is all quite nice," said Alison.

"But mind, I won't have him asked to lunch," said Mrs. Bayliss, gathering her papers together.

"No, no, of course not," said Alison, soothingly, half amused at the idea that such a meal as lunch still existed at their house. "There, that's all right, mother," and she went to the door again.

"Now, Mr. Carruthers," said she, "come in. I'm afraid you must have had a most uncomfortable ride."

"Awful! I got caught in a driving hail storm that nearly cut my face to bits; you see I haven't much left. Lovely place this to be out of! How do you do, Mrs. Bayliss?" and he shook the widow's hand with a good deal of grasp.

Mrs. Bayliss shrugged her shoulders.

"What was that, I heard you say as you came in?" she asked with a faint smile.

"I was saying—let me see—what was I saying? Oh, I know! I was saying"—and he took a chair and crushed his cap between his hands into as small a compass as possible—"I was saying this is a good place to be out of; and when you've seen another country or two you find it is!"

"And how is your cousin? You enjoyed

yourself at Nice, I suppose from your remark," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"I conclude we did, Mrs. Bayliss ; and I've grown quite American, you see. Poor old Alec was right enough out there under the palms and with plenty to amuse him ; but they would come back, they heard of that little spell of fine weather you had last month, and it was too much for them. Alec began to say he wearied to get home, and the others were wanted at Muirhead, so we came back. His cough's frightful again, poor old fellow. But it's about the fishing especially, I've ridden over. Now you haven't let it yet, I hope? I can't support life here without the fishing! Ours isn't of more than enough for my uncle and his friends. I like to feel independent."

"The fishing!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, thoughtfully, as if another problem had suddenly cropped up for solution. "Well, I promised to give Major Johnstone the refusal," and she paused.

"The Johnstone's won't be back until the end of July—wise people! That's the beauty of having a big house here—one's never in it. I'd be quite willing to—to—"

Enter Jessie, in spotless cuffs and collar, freshly fluffed up hair, and a few primroses

fastened beside her broach ; so pretty, so trim, in such dainty order, for no masculine observer would note the radical shabbiness of her dress.

Up sprang Mr. Malcolm Carruthers to welcome this vision of beauty. He was not at all bashful by nature, but the frank pleasure in Jessie's bright hazel eyes was almost too much for him.

She held out her hand as if he and she had been friends for many years.

"And so you've come back already ?" she said, with the slightest imaginable touch of the local accent. A little inflection of the voice, that was one of Jessie's many weapons of war ; not that she knew it. Mac Carruthers felt himself recompensed for all the hail-stones.

"Yes, they dragged us away, and Alec's all the worse for it. As for me, it doesn't much matter ; I'm as strong as an alligator."

"Have they told you we're just flitting South ?" asked Jessie, taking up her knitting with admirable composure.

"How horrible !" exclaimed the young man, fervently. "How intensely disgusting !"

"I thought you said this was such a lovely place to be out of ?" put in Alison, with a certain *naïveté*. "Why then should it be horrible for us to leave it ?"

"Oh, it's a jolly place enough in summer

and autumn!" said he, "and the severest part of the spring is over now. Think what it will be in another month or so."

"Jessie's remark was rather premature; we are *only thinking* of going South," said Mrs. Bayliss. "It was that that made me hesitate about the fishing. Of course, if we let this place, the tenant will most probably take the fishing too."

"But *pro tem*? Mayn't I have it *pro tem*? Not if I promise to give it up at a minute's notice?" pleaded Mac, eagerly.

"With such a proviso I don't know why you should not," said Mrs. Bayliss, grandly. "But you see," she went on with a slight unbending, "you see, our plans, are at present so—so very indefinite."

"Not at all," put in Jessie, audaciously, "we are going to London at once. Where we hope to—"

"That is by no means certain," said Mrs. Bayliss, cutting Jessie short.

"So much the better for me and my rod!" said Mac, rising to depart. "Thank you very much."

"Remember me to Mrs. Carruthers," said Mrs. Bayliss, shaking hands, after which Mac wished her Good morning and went out of the room.

The girls followed him into the hall, considerately closing the door behind them, that Mrs. Bayliss might not feel a draught.

"You don't mean that you really are flitting?" Mac asked, seriously, of Jessie, as they stood beside the late Captain's Indian trophies. (Alison had kindly retired to the icy drawing-room.)

"But we just are," said Alison's cousin.

"No, but, I say! It won't do, you know!" protested Mac.

"Won't do! I was fit to jump over the house when it was settled," said Jessie.

"Then it is settled?" he asked, under his voice.

"Aye, it is," said Jessie.

"Then I must have a rod in the Birren every day, spate or no spate! The Birren's running *café au lait* at present; never mind, it's clearing, it will be all right to-morrow, see if it isn't! I shall be glad of a little quiet fishing just to give me time to think of——" he broke off suddenly. "Oh! the American girls at Nice," and he heaved a great sigh. "And the Vienese girls!" and he heaved another, "Did you ever see a Vienese girl?"

"Never a one," said Jessie; "how should I?—we go nowhere. Are they so wonderful?"

“Well, they are—” and Mac held up his hand and shook his head up and down, as if absolutely unable to find an English word adequate to express the charms of the fair daughters of the Austrian capital. “They’re dreams! Visions! And they flirt—ah! *how* they flirt! And, what’s more, they make you flirt with them! St. Anthony himself couldn’t have resisted their wiles. They’re just perfection!”

“Ah! the dear things! How nice! How dull you’ll be fishing down by the brae-foot alone without them!” said Jessie, with mock gravity; at which Mac and she simultaneously burst out laughing, as if it were the drollest thing in the world. And they laughed, and laughed, and couldn’t stop their laughter.

“Oh,” said Jessie, when she could speak distinctly, “what a fine thing it is to have a really good laugh again! It’s months and months since I’ve laughed.”

“Surely the brilliant wit of the boy Baird must have made you merry often enough!” said Mac.

“You shan’t make fun of him! He’s been our only friend, and he didn’t go away like some others we could mention.”

“Won’t you say you’re glad to see me again?” asked Mac, turning his head a little

aside, and looking down at Jessie with as much sentiment as he could command.

“No, that I’ll not!” returned Jessie, stoutly, her words positively dancing with delight.

“Then say you’ve been dull without me?”

“No, that I’ll not!” repeated Jessie, with increasing fervour.

“Oh those Vienese girls!” exclaimed Mac, turning his eyes up to the ceiling. “Why was I torn away from them by ruthless duty?” and he heaved another sigh that again set Jessie laughing such a pretty musical laugh that Mac was encouraged, laughing also, to say, touching one of the little flowers at her broach,

“Look here; I’m going to have those to punish you for not being glad to see me again!”

But Jessie was too quick for him, and shielded them with her hand, which gave rise to a little skirmish and more laughter, and more talk, very foolish talk, far too foolish to put on paper, but very, very delightful to both of those silly young people.

“And when did you come home?” presently asked Jessie.

“We got home yesterday evening, too late for me to dare to come over,” said Mac.

“Then this is your first visit to anyone?” asked Jessie.

“Aye!” returned Mac.

“ You’re quite sure ? ” she asked with half a glance up at him.

“ Sure ! How can I be sure of anything when all my wits have gone out wool gathering ? I can’t stand so many blows ! I thought —well, never mind ; the idea of your leaving has quite crushed me. Why can’t you stay ? The weather will be splendid in a week or so—and I did think—but no matter ! ”

“ We can’t stay, because we haven’t any money,” said Jessie, simply.

“ What could be more beautiful ? Neither have I,” returned Mac, lightly. “ Say you won’t go ?—at least, not just yet.”

Something in Mac’s tone, as he spoke the last sentence, made Jessie’s colour rise and her eye-lids veil the beautiful eyes.

She drew back a little from him.

“ Won’t you be late for lunch ? ” she said, very much under her voice, still retreating.

They were not engaged, nor indeed had there ever been anything more than this frivolous sort of play.

“ You are glad to see me just one wee bit, though, aren’t you ? ” asked Mac, with a touch of earnestness.

“ I don’t know,” said Jessie, and paused. “ I wish you’d go now, she went on, hurriedly. Why don’t you go ? Will you go ? ”

Then there was more foolish and delightful talk. But at last Mac opened the door; McQuade brought up the horse, and a few minutes later Mac disappeared down that path by the brae side, up which the poor Captain and Major Johnstone had sauntered on that autumn afternoon when the fatal cups of tea had been passed to them through the open drawing-room windows.

Oh light of heart was Mac Carruthers as he faced the piercing wind once more!

As for Jessie she, after gazing out of window for a few minutes, sought out Alison, and to her she said, turning right away from her and looking at the opposite wall :

“ Alie, must we really go to London? Are we obliged to go? It’s very nice here in the fine weather. Isn’t it possible to stay, somehow or another? I don’t feel as if I wanted to leave Birrendale just yet. I’m like Auntie, I don’t think I *can* go. I wish that letter had not come.”

“ And only just now you were imploring me to take you away! ” exclaimed Alison.

“ Yes; but how was I to know? ” asked Jessie in return.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

LET us return to Arnold Birkett.

We left him at the corner of Barking Alley, Tower hill, within a good stone's throw of John Harbuckle's house in the north-west angle of Trinity Square. He stood for a moment on or very near the spot where in the middle of last century they cut off old Lord Lovat's grey but not particularly honourable head ; on which occasion the scaffold fell in, killing a good many of the people who were tippling at the bar that was doing a roaring trade underneath it.

Arnold Birkett's mind was, however, far too deeply engrossed in his own affairs for any historical association to have the slightest interest for him ; besides which he could not well recall this edifying circumstance, because he did not know it had ever occurred.

He looked as he felt, ill and grievously shaken ; but he made a great effort to rouse himself.

"I must remember," he told himself, "I must remember she was always delicate. Under the most favourable circumstances she could never have been a strong woman; and who shall say whether an early death is not better than a long weak life? Not that hers, poor darling, could never have been a long one; I'm more and more convinced it never could have been! But how could I help it?"

Was he conscious that he was trying to shelter himself under some subterfuge? Was he making the best of a bad case, before a conscience that refused to be deluded? He seemed, if it were so, to get but poor consolation from the attempt. Perhaps the stern judge within would have none of his specious pleading, or scorned to accept as an axiom, that necessity knows no law.

In spite of all excuses, he felt conscience-stricken and heart-sick, as he walked a short distance westward, through the busy streets.

Presently, feeling very cold and wretched, he turned into one of the many city dining-rooms.

He found a warm corner, where he took a basin of soup and some brandy, with great deliberation, while the other men who crowded the place were dispatching more substantial refreshments, at a rate perfectly unattainable

to those who have not for years accustomed themselves to getting their mid-day meal in from five to ten minutes.

“A herd of many swine feeding,” said Birckett to himself, grimly, as he began his own slight refection. “ ‘Tisn’t a lovely sight, but what would I give to be able to follow their example as once I could! Paugh! How sick I am of everything! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable it is to me! All this eager hurry and bustle, what’s the use of it?”

Two men behind him, having snatched a hasty meal, rushed off together in a great state of excitement.

“Happy beings, they’ve still something left to fight for! Happy any man who finds an object engrossing enough to take him out of himself, even if it’s only shellac! I suppose I shall have to go into business again. One must keep on living.”

Slightly warmed and refreshed, he went out again and wandered about the business lanes that lead out of Tower Street, and mingled with the crowd of merchants and brokers, hovering about the Commercial Sale Rooms, and found his way among the mysterious passages between the streets, where men were rushing to and fro with samples of drugs, or bundles of catalogues of forthcoming sales.

No one spoke to him, no one recognized him.

But after a while, among these busy throngs, his own footsteps quickened in sympathy. A kind of magnetic attraction held him to the place, a sense of being at home once more made him linger, a longing to throw himself again into the battle of life came upon him as he saw others fighting.

"It's no use," he said, "I must get into business again. I *will* get into business again. Who can tell? I might even yet be able to set myself right with the world, which is possible, if not with myself, which is impossible. Ah! if once I had had but half the money I have now, how different it might all have been! It seems all but useless, now. Is anything worth striving for? Yet a man must strive; how can one be idle among all these busy men, and how can a man who has so long been in business keep away from it? There's an old name—and there—and there. Those people have built new premises, I see. So-and-so seems to have taken a fresh partner," he went on, gradually becoming more and more interested with what he saw.

"Shall I go boldly to John Harbuckle, and tell him everything?" he asked himself presently. "He knows where my Jessie is.

I suppose it will come to that some time or another. Why not at once? No, I can't; I cannot. Am I radically a coward?—There are men I can't face. He's one of them."

The dining-room of the Tavistock is not very unlike the coffee-room. It is the fashion in that old established house to have the joints on wheeled tables for the better pleasing of those who are fastidious as to their cut of beef or mutton.

The waiter found Mr. Birkett difficult to please on the evening of this particular day; and no sooner had that most obliging functionary started to attend to some else, than Mr. Birkett called him back.

"Here, take that away," he said, shivering. "Let me have a large pot of strong tea and some toast, at once."

"You appear to feel this weather keenly," remarked the man who occupied the seat facing Arnold Birkett. It was the first sentence that had been spoken to him since he had landed, except by the hotel people.

"Why, yes," he returned. "It's the very opposite to the climate I've been accustomed to for many years past. Sho-o-o!" with another shiver. "These east winds are dreadful, they go right through and through me."

"Through any one who hasn't the hide of

a rhinoceros or some other pachy-what-do-you-call-it creature ! And you, I presume, have just come from the tropics. Pardon me, but as I see you are wearing a Zodiac ring, I'll venture to guess you've been recently on the West Coast of Africa."

"Your guess is correct. Yes, I've managed to put in eight years in that delightful place, with only two breaks of four months each at Madeira. You've seen these rings before ?" asked Birkett, twisting, as he spoke, a golden circlet from which the signs of the Zodiac stood out in high relief, round and round as he spoke.

"I've made a trip to the Cape many years since," returned the other, whose name I may as well say here was Tildesley, "and staying a few days at Madeira on my way home I noticed that all the men from the West Coast (and I met a good many there) wore those rings. I don't think I've seen them anywhere else."

"They are a speciality of our part of the world," said Birkett, "I suppose the Mohammedans introduced them."

"You don't mean to say you have Mohammedans out there ?" exclaimed Tildesley, who had been steadily working through an excellent dinner, from oysters to gorgonzola,

the last morsel of which he took as soon as he had asked the question.

“Thousands, I should say,” returned Birkett. “Very superior people, too, quite the best of the native tribes ; clothes wearers, and clean as well as picturesque.”

“Two good qualities not often found together,” interpolated Tilderley.

“As I have found to my cost only too often,” said Birkett, really quite delighted to have any one to talk to ; for in spite of his melancholy he was an essentially social being, with a great natural liking for society. “These Mandingo fellows, for the Mohammedans belong nearly all of them to the Mandingo tribe, are really fine men. They wear cloaks something like a priest’s robe, with wide sleeves, and as white as snow. The innocent whiteness of those robes does not, however, prevent their being excellent receptacles for stolen goods.”

“Then they’ve always a cloak for their sins. Ha ! ha !” laughed Mr. Tildesley.

Mr. Birkett laughed also, a good-natured laugh, and he looked straight across the table into Tildesley’s face, with eyes brightened for an instant with a pleasant light evidently peculiar to them. It was a something quite individual by which, if once noticed, you might easily have recognized Birkett again. It lasted

only for an instant, yet it made Tildesley interested in him. It was one of Mr. Birkett's peculiarities that people always were interested in him, and always wanted to know more about him.

"The African climate doesn't seem to have injured you much," Tildesley went on, after a short chuckle over his wretched pun. "(Waiter, you can bring me some tea—); I thought the Coast was the white man's grave?"

"You wouldn't think it but know it, if you'd lived there," said Birkett. "You dine with a man on Sunday and go to his funeral on Monday."

"Sharp work!" ejaculated Tildesley.

"Sharp indeed! I've had considerably over a hundred doses of fever myself, and during the last attack I heard them order my coffin, and remark that I should make a good corpse; so I determined not to risk another; although, climate apart, the Coast life suits me; it's so pleasant to feel you're making money quickly."

"Ah, it must be! It must be! That unfortunately is a feeling one seldom knows in London, very seldom indeed. Ah!"

And Mr. Tildesley sighed a long drawn sigh, and shook his head with a dolefulness

that contrasted rather odd with his eminently prosperous appearance. He was short, stout, with a shining bald head, a spotless white cravat, an expanse of magnificent shirt-front, and other indications of a dress suit under the grey over-coat.

“Ah!” he continued with another sigh. “Perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling me how money is quickly made in any part of the world just now? Not, of course, if it’s a trade secret.”

“No secret,” said Birkett, easily; “although times aren’t even with us what they were a few years ago. Competition has reached even us; but then you see fever kills off so many of our competitors that the staying horse is bound to win.”

“Ha! and you’ve been a staying horse, I suppose?” asked Mr. Tildesley, stroking his carefully shaven chin as he looked up at Birkett rather keenly.

“To a certain extent, yes; I’ve seen the last of a good many,” replied Birkett, in a tone that invited further questioning.

“Know London?”

“My knowledge of London is like our Coast fever, intermittent. I have vague childish memories of it. When I was a young man I was again in London for a few months

(but that, as I need not tell you, is now many years ago), and I returned from Africa only yesterday."

"I'm happy to have met with you. It's something to have sat by a man who's had a hundred odd fevers and got over them. Are you making a long stay at this house?—if so I'll call. My name's Tildesley, Dunster Court, Mincing Lane and 'Crow's Nest,' Lambrooke."

The two men exchanged cards.

"Thanks," said Birkett, as he put Tildesley's card into his case. "I shall be here at any rate for a fortnight, and I shall be very pleased to see you. May I call upon you in the City?"

"Do," said Tildesley, "I shall be delighted to see you. I'm seldom out long together, choose your own time. I expect Mrs. Tildesley and my son and his wife directly; we're going to hear 'Madame Angot,' with some friends from Liverpool. What will you do with yourself?"

"Oh, I shan't venture out again; I'll get up a roaring fire in my room and turn in early; perhaps I may stave off the attack I feel is hovering about me."

Here, Mr. Tildesley's son came in and announced that "the others" were waiting in the brougham.

"Well, good night to you," said the elder

Tildesley, rising and buttoning up his over-coat. "I hope you'll be better to-morrow. I say, look me up in the City to-morrow, if you can!"

"I will," said Birkett, with another of those gleams of light in his eyes. "May you all have a pleasant evening!"

So they parted.

"Is that man to be trusted?" was the first question each one asked himself a moment afterwards.

"Liverpool people, eh?" said Birkett to himself, as he went upstairs to his own room. "I think I'd rather not see any Liverpool people just yet. What's the good?"

Again, as on the evening before, his meditations by the roaring fire, as he sat in the great chintz-covered chair, all bright with poppies and cornflowers, seemed, to judge by his expression, far from consolatory.

Again he took out the portraits, again he kissed them; was it a form, a habit, a long established custom, begun when they were fresh but fading with them?

This evening he lingered over all that was left of the portrait of the little girl:

"Shall I look for her?" he asked.

After a long pause, he answered:

"Not yet! Not yet! It won't do yet!"

Let me see what turns up here first. Having waited so long, let me wait until——”

And he went off into a region of thought, where we cannot follow him.

“Am I an arrant coward? Ah, there are things that the boldest man couldn’t face if he had a vestige of conscience left.”

“I must know what has become of her!” he said at last. “She is all I have left to me in this world. In this world! How do I know? Perhaps she, too, is gone. John Harbuckle could tell me. He knows. Come what may I’ll call on him to-morrow! He has no reason to love me, I admit; and yet, it’s strange, but so it is, he’s the only man I feel I can trust. I’ll call on John Harbuckle to-morrow.”

Not without much inward strife did Arnold Birkett come to this determination. The agitation of the whole day and the keen east wind now began to tell alarmingly upon him. A few minutes later, he was shuddering over the fire with African ague.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE TRANSITION PERIOD.

JOHN HARBUCKLE could not settle down after that upheaval of his deepest affections.

By force of habit he managed to attend to his business much as usual, but no sooner had he left his office than a restless spirit took possession of him.

No longer could he sit by the hour, writing antiquarian letters ; no longer could he take pleasure in the discussions of the “Earth-Worms,” that celebrated Club in Great Turner Street, with whose members he had spent so many a happy evening ; no longer was the chairmanship of the “Young Men’s Christian Association” sufficient to fill the place in his heart, which he now felt, more acutely than ever, was empty.

The Birrendale people kept him waiting for a day longer than was necessary. He could not settle down to anything ; he spent two evenings in wandering about the London

streets. At other times, he rarely went ten yards without finding some fresh object of interest, now he walked along, scarcely seeing anything except that circumstance of four and twenty years ago, and what had come of it; the circumstance that to his mind was expressed by the one word "Jessie."

The Jessie he remembered was the mother of that very pretty girl in Birrendale. She had been pretty, too, but her beauty had been of a gentler, less vigorous type than her daughter's.

It was she who had lived in Catherine Court. Perhaps the City air did not suit her; she was always fragile and delicate there. To John Harbuckle that had been one of her charms. She was younger than he. As a child, she used to play with his sister Mary, who was the youngest of the family. John Harbuckle had always been very fond of Jessie of Catherine Court. As she grew up his love for her increased. She was accustomed to seeing him; she thought she loved him. They used to stroll about the Tower Gardens together of an evening. They were, at last, to have been married in a few weeks; he had taken a house out of town, thinking she might grow stronger in the country air.

But they never went into that house.

Mary Harbuckle was then engaged to James Bayliss, whom she had met when staying with some friends near Woolwich.

Mary was rather a pretty blonde in those days.

One evening, John Harbuckle and his Jessie were sitting on the bench under the acacias that face the Beauchamp Tower, talking of their new home with quiet happy contentment, when they saw Mary and James and, for the first time, Arthur Bayliss, the brother of James. Arthur Bayliss was a tall, handsome man, very much his brother's superior, and with singularly attractive ways.

Poor Jessie soon found out that her liking for John Harbuckle was only a calm affectionate regard. She wrote him an honest letter. She told him all, offered still to marry him if he would not release her. He could not marry her without her love ; so she became the wife of Arthur Bayliss, who was then the head of the prosperous Liverpool firm his father had created.

John Harbuckle heard little of them for some years. Then came rumours of trouble and disaster. At last, opening the *Times* one morning, he saw the announcement of the death of an Arthur Bayliss, of Liverpool, and a

day or two later the same announcement, with the addition of the full address and—this important item :

“Drowned, in the foundering of the African mail steamer, ‘Mellicurrie.’”

There were in the paper of that and the preceding two or three days the announcements of several other deaths by the same casualty, together with the details of the wreck as given by the only survivor, the mate.

John Harbuckle, who had a book of carefully-arranged newspaper cuttings, kept that announcement.

From Captain Bayliss, who had just returned from India with little more than his pay, John Harbuckle heard soon afterwards that Jessie and her one little girl were entirely dependent upon her brother-in-law.

As soon as he well could he called on Jessie. He found her ill in mind and body, and in widow's weeds. With infinite gentleness he asked her again to be his wife, offering to wait her time, however long it might be. She turned upon him with such shrinking horror in her face as he had never dreamed of before ; he could but think that grief had turned her brain. She died a few months later, and Captain and Mrs. Bayliss took her little girl to live with them.

Then a legacy was left to Arthur Bayliss. Captain James, was the next of kin. He took that as well as the little girl, throwing it away upon Cauldknowe, and was now himself dead.

Such is a brief outline of the history on which John Harbuckle meditated as he wandered up and down the London streets.

Is it to be wondered at that he thought more of Jessie Bayliss than of any of the others in Birrendale? There was to him something very sacred and solemn and yet romantic in the thought that he should now have to shelter that girl, that daughter of his lost Jessie, from the hardships that without his protection she would have to endure.

“A very dear girl! A very dear girl! And Her daughter! “They ought not to have lost a post. I hope I shan’t have trouble with them! But Mary’s difficult to deal with; she always was, poor thing, even James felt so at times. If there isn’t a letter this morning, I shall go at once; I cannot bear this suspense,” he said to himself as he went down to breakfast, the third morning after his letter had been posted.

John Harbuckle’s dining table proper being now entirely covered with books and papers which none dared to touch, breakfast had

been laid for him on a small, straight-legged Chippendale affair, that had been drawn up near the fire, as the morning, though bright, was chilly.

The arrangements of the meal were to the thinking of Mr. and Mrs. Robbins and of John Harbuckle himself admirable.

The damask cloth was shining and spotless; the old silver tea-pot warmly muffled in a thick cosy; the great blue china cup still un-chipped; the *Times* and letters waiting to be read beside it; the fish, eggs and toast done to a turn, the only chair that was not laden with books drawn up to the fire; and a pot of choice red tulips flaming in the centre of the table amidst a morning sunbeam that entered the room through a south-east window.

This was a little picture John Harbuckle's eyes had often rested upon with pleasure. To-day it struck him that that picture was after all but still life, mere *genre*. It lacked something—no, somebody.

He took up the letters with nervous eagerness. At last there was one with the Kirkhope postmark.

“But not in Mary’s hand,” he said, “I’m afraid I shall have trouble with Mary!”

He opened the note, it was only a very brief one from Alison :

“Cauldknowe, by Kirkhope,  
“Birrendale.  
“April 12th, 187—

“DEAR UNCLE JOHN,

“My mother requests me to thank you for your kind letter. We shall be happy to see you here as soon as you can make it convenient to come.

“The weather is extremely cold, so be sure you wear your warmest clothes.

“Hoping to see you soon, and with best love from all of us,

“I am, dear Uncle John,  
“Your affectionate niece,

“ALISON BAYLISS.”

Not much of a letter, truly, but what a work it had been to get it off! What a quantity of Alison's scribbling paper had gone behind the fire, covered with Mrs. Bayliss' writing, before she had consented to her daughter's doing the business for her.

Uncle John read a great deal more between the lines than in them; but even he little knew what battles had been fought over nearly every important word.

“Now, I shall have to be firm with Mary,” he said, “the thing of all others I detest being when dealing with a woman. She'll never forgive me; but duty is duty. I see mine

clearly in this case, and I am not going to be thwarted. Mary and the girls must come here, at least until we can see what next is to be done. But I foresee trouble! I never yet have been able to fight a woman. How complicated life grows as soon as you introduce the domestic element! Dear, dear, dear me!"

That note spoiled his breakfast. He read the few lines many times. He could not like them; they certainly were not Alison's.

"I'll go North by the night mail," he said.

"I'd go this morning only I can't put off 'Hartington's affair.' Let me think: to-day's Friday, I must be here on Wednesday to meet Rogers and South. "I can just manage it. I must go to Glasgow on Monday and settle up that wretched business with the money lender. I don't like it. It's a dead loss, however, the quicker it's done the better. No, I'm not going to let Mary ruin me; although I've no doubt that is what Mary would call doing my duty. I'll send Mary a telegram. I'll tell her to expect me to breakfast to-morrow. I'll send it off at once."

After a short search he found a form, and sent the message to the post office by the hand of the trusty Robbins, who lost no time

in conveying its wording to his wife, as soon as he returned.

The suspicions of the worthy couple had already been aroused by John Harbuckle's abnormal behaviour. Mr. and Mrs. Robbins were now convinced that, to use their own expression, "something was hup."

As the old bachelor saw the door close upon Mr. Robbins, he became exceedingly conscious that he had indeed crossed the Rubicon. He stood on his hearth-rug with his back to the fire and surveyed the room, where for so many years he had reigned supreme, with a fond regret. He felt his mastership was fast coming to a close.

"It's all over!" he said, shaking his grey head. "It's all come to an end! What would Mary say to that table full of books? They shall all go upstairs. I'll have a den there—but it will never be this one! Never!"

His glance fell on some old Wedgwood plaques he had bought a day or two before the upheaval. They were lying among a number of catalogues and papers on the top of a bureau. He went to them. "Soft as velvet;" he said, passing his fingers over the surface of one of them, with almost a caressing tenderness. "Better than I thought they were. Those figures are Flaxman's! Ah!

All that little game's nearly over! Woolcomb may have these for what I gave for them. I know he wants them."

Then he took up a small jar of the same material, the surface of which was gently rippled. With even greater tenderness he passed his finger up and down over the little undulations. "How soft! How exquisitely soft!" he said; the sense of touch awakening long passed associations. "How like her hand!"

Robert Browning tells us of :

"Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,  
After a dropping April found alive,  
Spark-like, 'mid unearthened slope-side fig-tree roots,  
That roof old tombs at Chuisi."

"*Found alive, spark-like,*" after ages of burial ! so alive and so spark-like was John Harbuckle's unearthened love for the girl that once had lived in Catherine Court, the Jessie he had wooed and lost in the Tower Gardens.

He put the jar down with a sigh, crossed the passage and went into the drawing-room. It had hardly been used since his mother's death, nor indeed in any conventional sense for some years before that lamented event.

John Harbuckle had found it a handy place for putting away such old furniture and curious books and rare china as he could not cram

into his dining-room. On rainy evenings, when he did not care either to go out or to write antiquarian letters, he had been very fond of prowling about that room ; he had a great affection for his things, and as he generally kept Mr. Robbins at work on them, he had always found enough to do in arranging what was to be done. Nor had it been merely selfish pleasure. He and his man not unfrequently, by dint of mending and polishing, often rendered tables, chairs and cabinets very acceptable presents for newly-married people of good taste ; and he generally had on hand an old carved oak chest or two, new centuries since : “ When ancient dames chose forth brocade—when reds and blues were indeed red and blue,” but still very useful for holding a more perishable modern trousseau ; such chest he had found very generally appreciated by the daughters of several of his friends ; they made an agreeable variety to card baskets and dressing bags, as wedding presents. He took a deep and genuine interest in young married—or about to be married—people.

“ I’ll have those two done up for the girls,” he said ; “ the other things—ah ! Mary will say I’ve turned the place into a broker’s shop—I shall have to make some sort of a clearance, and I hate clearing up ! I suppose I

must sell these things and buy a new piano, and fashionable jim-cracks."

Poor John Harbuckle! I am afraid that his sister Mary cast a very cold shadow before her, a shadow that fell on him and chilled him.

Perhaps it was because he had been looking at those old chests, and thinking they would suit the girls; perhaps it was that ever since he had heard that voice from the cab his mind had been so full of one subject; perhaps because the soft ripples of the Wedgwood jar had felt to his touch so like a long vanished hand; but just as he re-entered his dining-room, for one fraction of a second, he saw a shadowy form of a girl sitting on the window settle half hidden by the faded crimson curtains.

He was not at all surprised. Jessie of Catherine Court had been there times without number. He only thought it would be very sweet to come up from the office now and then and find her daughter, real and living, sitting there.

It was astonishing, even to himself, how the image of Jessie Bayliss had grown in his mind these last few days.

He again took up his place on the rug. He had not yet, so preoccupied had he been, looked over the *Times*. There it lay, still

folded, on the table ; part of the first column and the date, April 11th, exposed to view.

John Harbuckle's thoughts presently reached a point at which to look at that paper, with its first column and its date, seemed by natural and unforced sequence the next step.

"April 11th ! Then Monday was the 7th ! I remember that was the date I wrote on my letter to Mary. The 7th ! That's curious !"

He crossed over to the Wedgwood plaques, and having moved them, unearthed the book containing his newspaper cuttings, on which they had been lying.

He carefully turned over the pages until he came upon this :

"On the 7th of April, drowned in the foundering of the African mail steamer, 'Melliecurrie,' Arthur Bayliss, of —— Street, Liverpool."

"That's curious, very curious," said John Harbuckle. "The 7th of April, eight years ago ! Well, well ; a coincidence, a mere coincidence ! Eight years ago ! Exactly eight years ! Curious, very curious ! It's time I was in the office. I shall have several things to arrange to-day. But that date and that voice is certainly a strange coincidence ! I shan't mention it to Mary. She'll have a theory to account for it at once."

On the stairs, John Harbuckle met Mr. Robbins, who asked him, what bag or portmanteau he would like for the journey.

He told him briefly and went on, feeling suddenly half ashamed of himself and uncertain whether he were not going to treat Mr. and Mrs. Robbins rather shabbily.

He arranged for his few days' absence, and returned in the evening to his nest, feeling that he must give Robbins a preparatory hint before starting for Scotland. This weighed heavily upon him; his well-served dinner affected him as a silent reproach from Mrs. Robbins, his carefully-packed travelling bag was, as it were, coals of fire heaped by Robbins himself upon his master's guilty head.

"Back on Wednesday to breakfast did you say, sir?" asked Robbins, as he pulled the collar of John Harbuckle's overcoat straight.

"On Wednesday to breakfast," returned the perfidious old bachelor, as if oppressed with a grievous burden. "To breakfast," he repeated. "And, perhaps—O, hem! I had better tell you that my widowed sister, and her—and my nieces are thinking of coming to stay here shortly."

"Oh, indeed, sir!" was Mr. Robbins' audible remark.

"The house is rather crowded with things;

I'm afraid—I'm afraid we shall have to make a new arrangement," said John Harbuckle, unpleasantly conscious that to his own mind, at least, the last sentence could be taken in two ways.

"The ladies will make things a bit pleasant for you, sir," remarked Robbins, blandly. "Will they be staying long?"

"I can't tell, I can't tell at all. I hope so."

"Cab, sir? It's a nasty night; better have one."

"Very well," assented Mr. Harbuckle, thankful to be rid of the man's presence; so a few minutes later he was duly packed off to catch his train for the North.

"Pore old chap," observed Mr. Robbins, when he had related the news to his wife; "pore old chap! Don't he look as if he was going to be 'anged, that's all."

"Serve him right, the mean scoundrel!" exclaimed Mrs. Robbins. "Ladies, indeed! Not if I know it! Ladies, indeed!—the mean creatures! Don't talk to me, I'm up to their tricks, and I can't abide 'em, and, what's more, I won't! Me stay in the house with Mrs. B. for my missis! No, thank you, no missis for me! And the way we've slaved after him, too! Well I did think better of him, that I did! Talk of gratitood! Poof!"

John Harbuckle, as he was whirled through the Midlands, had an uncomfortable feeling that some such remark had been made about him, and he could not rise to a cheerful view of the situation.

The long night journey made him still more depressed. Daybreak among the Westmoreland hills soothed him a little ; his spirits sank again as he crossed the dead levels by the side of the cold grey Solway ; they were at zero when he alighted at the shabby little station of Kirkhope.

There he found a walk of a couple of miles before him ; for the much besplashed little omnibus, that later in the day awaited the trains, had not yet made its appearance.

The aspect of everything was dreary and unlovely in the extreme. The sky was leaden grey, there was a biting wind.

John Harbuckle crossed the cobble stones of the wide High Street of Kirkhope, and struck into a fine, hard turn pike road, running between beech-hedges, with here and there plantations of spruce, fir and larch.

After he had walked about two miles with the wind in his face, he came to the avenue of rhododendrons that led to Mrs. Bayliss's house, and soon afterwards found himself on the red door-step, with the white

lines and dots, and, a minute later, before the blazing fire in the dining-room of Cauldknowe, where the cloth was already laid for breakfast.

Early as it was, Mrs. Bayliss had gone round to the farm. The two girls were in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Happily the scones had the moment before been transferred to their dish, and carefully wrapped up in shining white damask, so that without delay Alison and Jessie were able to run off to welcome uncle John, whom they found trying to warm his hands by a fire which had hardly been lighted long enough to have much heat in it.

Alison, who held in affectionate memory his few words anent her “Border Towers” ran in looking very much delighted.

“Well, my dear child!” said John Harbuckle, in hardly so slow a tone as was usual with him.

“Dear uncle John, I’m so very very glad to see you again!” exclaimed Alison, who was an extremely warm-hearted girl, kissing him with a genuine welcome. “How cold and hungry you must be!”

“It looks very winterly here still, my dear —Ah, Jessie!” and he put out his hand to her, but without taking it she kissed him, just

as Alison had done, and called him “Dear uncle John.”

“That voice! I hear it again in hers!” passed through John Harbuckle’s brain, as Jessie’s “Dear uncle John,” reached his ear.

## CHAPTER XI.

### JESSIE WILL PLAY.

“YOUR mother, Alison?” John Harbuckle asked, when their greeting was over.

“She’s gone across to the farm,” said Alison. “She always goes first thing in the morning, but we are rather earlier than usual, because we were expecting you. There now, let me draw this arm-chair to the fire, and do try if you cannot get warm.” Alison pushed a great chair up to the fire as she spoke.

But John Harbuckle had gone to the window, and was looking out on the knotty lawn and at the opening in the woods, no longer clear cut but overhung with unlopped branches, through which the Birren was to be seen, still rushing down to meet the Solway. “Very winterly!” he said, aloud.

“A dear girl! A very dear girl! How like her poor mother she’s grown. But it’s his voice and his eyes,” was the thought that had driven him to the window.

“I wish it only *would* look winterly,” exclaimed Alison. “It was lovely in the winter time; while you were having those dreadful fogs in London, the sun was bright and clear as if it were summer. Why, one day in Christmas week, when we were having lunch at the Johnstones, and someone was telling us that in London they were burning gas all day, I could see, as I sat at table, the Solway shining like silver in the distance; and the sun was so bright they had to let down the dining-room blind half-way.”

“Then you wouldn’t like to go to foggy London?” asked Mr. Harbuckle, turning round.

“Oh, uncle John, it’s the dream of our lives!” said Alison.

“And Alison’s going to write all the London novels that Sir Walter hadn’t time to get done!” cried Jessie.

John Harbuckle opened his eyes, which were of a good clear blue, and remarked:

“You don’t say so!”

“Yes indeed, and I’m to be the heroine!” Jessie went on.

“And a very nice heroine too—a very nice heroine too!” And John Harbuckle’s straight, shrewd lips parted with a kindly smile as he retreated to the fire and the arm-chair, and

surveyed both the girls with evident interest and approval.

“Very nice! So you’ll think when you’ve tasted my scones!” laughed Jessie. “I’m going to fetch them, the neat wee things! they’re just a picture to look at!”

“Like their fabricator,” said the worthy John Harbuckle, slowly and quietly, as if stating the driest fact.

“Thanks,” Jessie threw back from the door; “pretty speeches don’t often come my way.” And she vanished as Alison had already done.

“More vivacious than poor mother ever was!” sighed John Harbuckle, as he leaned forward with his broad palms outstretched to the blaze for some minutes, all alone.

Then the girls came back.

He looked up, they were busy about the room; both, to him, very charming, with their little red and black plaid shawls pinned over their shoulders.

“Now, uncle John, mother won’t mind our beginning before she comes in,” said Alison, when all was arranged. “She said we were not to wait; she’ll be back directly. There, now, what do you think of Jessie’s scones?”

“I’ll tell you better in a minute or two; Mrs. Robbins has made me over fastidious,”

said he, drawing his chair up to the table, and choosing one of Jessie's "neat wee things," which he buttered and tasted with critical deliberation. "Mrs. Robbins must hide her diminished head, Jessie," he said, when he had formed his opinion. "These homely cakes please me better than all her divers subtleties in the way of sweets. You will make them for me sometimes?"

"Perhaps," said Jessie. "Is it quite settled that we are to go?"

"Quite settled as far as I am concerned," returned John Harbuckle. "Do you think I could face my solitary hearth after having been an actor in this charming scene? No; I shall want scones and my nieces every morning with my breakfast. Rooms look very empty without girls; nothing else furnishes them."

"Then you are only going to consider us as goods and chattels?" asked Jessie, with a slight pretence at displeasure.

"My dear child! girls are the most valuable creatures in the world!" said uncle John, as if deprecating Jessie's last remark.

"I'm thankful to hear it," said Jessie.

They had just finished breakfast when Mrs. Bayliss arrived.

"Well, John!"

“ Well, Mary ! ” then followed a kiss by no means demonstrative.

“ A bitter wind, John.”

“ Take this chair by the fire, Mary. You look ‘ nipped up.’ ”

“ No, I won’t turn you out ; besides, I rarely sit near the fire. I’m used to being in the cold by this time,” said Mary, taking off her hat and shawl and then sitting at the end of the table.

She looked then neither lovely nor amiable. Her usual bald effect was heightened by the want of her cap and hemstitched collar, which Jessie perceiving went to fetch, she, although herself, seemed quite callous about her appearance. “ Nothing mattered now,” she said only too often.

The presence of her brother at that time was far from soothing, it was an offence to her. She drank her first cup of coffee amidst a silence no one dared to disturb.

Jessie came in with the cap, collar and cuffs, but Mary, although she saw them plainly enough, did not attempt to take them from her niece. So they had to repose on the sofa.

Jessie went to her place at the table and the silence grew profound as well as irksome.

Presently Mrs. Bayliss put her hand into

her pocket, and drew out a little packet enclosed in a newspaper wrapper.

“Here, Alison,” she said, handing the packet to Jessie *en route* to the person to whom it was addressed, “this is for you; it’s the only thing the post-man brought this morning.”

Alison, who was in the act of pouring out Jessie’s second cup, filled it much too full.

She took the packet and hurriedly tearing off the wrapper, unrolled two long strips of printed paper, at the sight of which she flushed up to the very roots of her hair.

“Your proof, Alison?” asked John Harbuckle.

“I suppose so,” she returned, under her breath, looking at the strips that curled about as if alive, with eyes that had suddenly grown very bright with amazement and delight.

She had heard of “proofs” of course, but that a real “proof” should ever be addressed to her was something too wonderful; it quite dazed her for the moment.

Uncle John looked at her with deep interest. “Your ‘Border Towers?’” he asked.

She found the heading; sure enough it was her own paper—her very own! She wanted to rush away with it at once, and make the acquaintance of this first child of her brain,

and pen in the secrecy of her own room ; but there she was inexorably tied to the breakfast-table ; she could not get away.

“Accept my congratulations, my dear,” said John Harbuckle, kindly.

“Ah ! your poor father had bitter cause to lament that ever he saw a proof,” sighed Mrs. Bayliss. “I hope, Alison, your literary career may be a brighter one than his.”

But Alison hardly heard this remark, so intent was she upon reading here and there a well-remembered sentence, which brought to her the conviction that those printed words were indeed her very own.

“You bring good luck, uncle John,” she said, presently, turning her bright face, still trembling with amazement, to him.

“Well, well, let’s take this as a good omen,” said he. “London will be a vast field for you.”

“I’m sure I shall be thankful for success of any kind,” sighed Mrs. Bayliss. “Alison, my dear,” she added, trying to speak kindly, “I see you’re anxious to go over that. Tell Janet to light the drawing-room fire; uncle John and I have a good deal to talk over.”

Thus dismissed Alison went off, Jessie following close behind her.

“Look here, Alison,” said Jessie, as soon as they were in the hall, “don’t trouble about

the drawing-room, I'll see to that, you be off to our room, you'll not feel cold, I'm sure."

So Alison went to her room, shut to the door, fell down on her knees with the proof in her hand all waving about, gave thanks with the most devout and tender joy; and a faint sunbeam stole out from under the grey clouds and fell upon her, and warmed her as she knelt there. Never if she lives to patriarchal age; never, should it be given her to write world-famous books, will she forget with what happy maternal gratitude she read through her first proof.

Jessie did not like being left unprotected, so instead of returning to the breakfast table she went into the drawing-room, where she employed herself in putting things to rights, and in trying to make up her mind whether or not she wanted to go to London, and whether she were glad or not that Mac Carruthers had come back.

"Eminent literary lady, may I come in?" she called, tapping at Alison's door, after the lapse of half-an-hour or so, during which time Alison had read through her proof three times, and finding several phrases needing correction, had resolved to consult uncle John on the all important matter of getting them right.

"Oh—come in!" answered Alison, with

another blush; for on points on which she was sensitive the slightest word made her quiver.

“But I’m so dreadfully frightened, talented authoress!” called Jessie through the key-hole in mock terror.

“Illustrious heroine, will you enter—or will you be an idiot?” returned Alison. Thus adjured, Jessie came in, to find Alison standing by the window with the strips of paper still in her hands.

“Mrs. Jellaby, please am I to do all the work of Bleak House this morning? If I may venture to ask so practical a question,” said Jessie. “Come, you must have read those curly-whirlies by this time.”

“I do believe Mr. Baird has been altering some of my sentences!” exclaimed Alison; a suspicion she had had for some time suddenly becoming conviction.

“Oh, the traitor! won’t I pay his boy out for it!” said Jessie; “but really Alison, it’s getting late, it’s just upon nine; let’s get tidied up a bit, before Auntie and uncle John begin to run all over the place. Come Mrs. Jellaby!”

“You shan’t call me bad names. I’m sure I’m always tidying up! I make a much better pudding than you do, although you are

professionally a domestic woman and I'm not ; —but—I wish Mr. Baird hadn't altered my sentences ! ”

“ Improved as well as altered them.”

“ Perhaps ; but I like them to be mine ! , ‘ An ill-favored thing, but mine own,’ ” said Alison.

“ There's a good deal in that,” said Jessie, more seriously. “ I like things to be mine own ; and as for people, to be mine own is a good quality that covers all deficiencies.” She paused a moment and then went on as if offering some sort of apology. “ But I couldn't help being pleased to see uncle John, this morning, you know, and I think he was pleased that I was pleased, wasn't he ? Still I don't want to be taken away from Birreudale just yet.”

“ I wish Mac Carruthers had kept away altogether ! What can you see in him ? A more thoroughly uninteresting young man I never met. I should tire of him in two minutes.”

“ So should I of your wretched ‘ Border Towers,’ ‘ A poor thing but mine own ! ’ ” said Jessie, turning away her head a little.

“ Don't you be too sure ! ”

“ Well, I suppose he is a trifle flirtful, but then—so am I. It doesn't mean anything ;

one must have some one to talk to ; life's so dreary when there's no one about."

"I don't find it so," said Alison, vigorously shaking up the bed they had begun to make. Nor was it at that moment, for her thoughts were crowding fast and thick just then, so stirred had they been by those strips of printed paper.

"Then as you're so happy and contented," said Jessie, "when we've finished the rooms you'd better make the pudding and I'll go and look if there's anything for soupage left in the garden."

"McQuade brought in every bit he could find yesterday."

"I'd rather trust my own eyes," said Jessie.

So saying, she put on her hat and jacket, and went out. Not, however, into the steep kitchen garden, behind the house, but down the moss-grown brae-side path that led to the Birren. There, sheltered by the thick ever-green woods, through which ran a never silent bourn, the polypodies had flourished bright and green all the long winter ; and there a few early primroses were blooming.

Jessie gathered a handful of leaves and blossoms, and stole cautiously down to the little stone bridge under which the bourn was singing

its last song, before it fell into the river, and lost its own identity.

On this little bridge Jessie stood awhile and she looked this way and she looked that—first to her right along the path by the river-side, then to the left among the spaces between the ashy grey stems of the great beeches that grew on one bank of the stream, then she turned to the narrow winding path she had just descended, then to the tall firs and heavy spruces that grew on the opposite bank. Not a human being could she see anywhere, nor hear any sound, except the last song of the bourn, and the rushing of the brown, white crested river.

“It’s far too early for Mac Carruthers and there’ll be never a fish caught to-day!” she said to herself and again she looked this way, and that, but saw no one.

“It’s far too early,” she said to herself again, “and I wish Mac Carruthers had stayed away altogether. Who’s that yonder by the silver firs?” And she looked eagerly along the river path, and half turned to run away up the brae-side.

“It’s just the water bailiff; if so, I’ll go home again,” and she began to retrace her steps, stopping now and then to gather some leaf, deeply stained with orange or scarlet.

A footfall presently startled her, she turned with heightened colour, half expecting to meet MacCarruthers; but instead of seeing the young man, she only beheld the boy Baird, the minister's son, a lad of about eighteen, whose studies were, unfortunately, too often disturbed by visions of Miss Jessie Bayliss. He had been following close behind the water bailiff, and had seen Jessie on the bridge and had hurried to meet her.

"How are ye?" he asked, as he came up to Jessie, in a curious sing-song intonation.

"I'm just nipped up with the cold," said Jessie, pulling hard at a long trail of minute ivy as she spoke, and never vouchsafing him so much as one glance of her eyes.

Without a word, "the boy Baird," as the girls always called him, plunged his hand into his pocket, drew out his knife, and cut the ivy.

"Thanks," said Jessie, rising from her stooping position, and turning to him with a smile that nearly slew him on the spot.

"Maggie says you're going South," he stammered, for he had been all but deprived of speech by the radiant glance of thanks.

"How did Maggie come to hear of it?" asked Jessie.

"She heard it yesterday, when she and

mother called at Mrs. Carruthers's. "Twill be just dreary without you!" said the lad.

"It's dreary enough, even with me, I'm thinking," said Jessie. "And I can't stay out in the wind any longer, so just climb up and get me some of those polypodies, and then gather me a handful or two of primroses, there's a good fellow, for uncle John is here to-day, and we must have something pretty for the table."

"All right," exclaimed Baird, who much prompter in action than in speech, at once began to get out of his ulster, that he might climb the better.

So Jessie went in with such spoils as she had already collected, leaving Baird, who ought to have been on his way to the tutor's, with whom he was cramming, scrambling up a tree that had a very green and mossy trunk and dragging down the polypodies with an energy that leads one to suspect that his father's interferences with Mrs. Bayliss's affairs was not absolutely disinterested.

The fact was that young Baird's description of the privations the girls had endured, together with the time the lad wasted, had determined the clergyman to write that letter. Mr. Baird had not, however, thought fit to confide this to his son.

Jessie entered the house by the back door. In the kitchen she found Alison stoning raisins for a pudding.

"Well, where are the vegetables?" Alison asked, as Jessie came in with nothing more substantial than ivy and primroses in her hands.

"I don't know," said Jessie. "But anyhow we'll have fine decorations, for the boy Baird is hard at work out on the brae. He'll be round here directly."

And so he was. With his folded ulster full of leaves and primroses. He stood proudly on the red door-step and rang the bell with a vehemence peculiar to himself.

"There's your slave," said Alison, and off went Jessie to reduce him to a still more abject condition by her gratitude.

"Oh, thanks, thanks! you've done nobly!" she said, and she took the folded ulster and its treasures into her arm, thereby making herself into a picture so admirable that the poor boy was ready to fall down and kiss the ground at her feet, when behold who should they see trotting round the corner and along the broad drive beside the great banks of rhododendron but Mr. Malcolm Carruthers, himself on his cousin Alec's horse.

Now Jessie was perfectly aware that stand-

ing there in the door-way, her arms full of green fronds and pale primroses, with her boyish adorer gazing at her, she made a charming something to look at among the surrounding bleak bareness, so that in spite of the cutting wind she stayed there to welcome Mac Carruthers.

The picture wanted no interpreter for Mac — Jessie was charming—the boy too young to make Mac jealous.

Mac rode quickly up to the door.

“Good morning, Miss Bayliss!” he said, “I’ve brought you a little offering!”

The boy suddenly turned round and looked as if he would have slain him. Mac noticed the ferocity of his expression, it amused him intensely.

“All my friends are remembering me to-day!” said Jessie, brightly. Which little speech made the poor boy think her more of a goddess than ever, it was so kind of her to put him among her friends.

“Who could forget you?” asked Carruthers gallantly.

“Some people find it easy enough,” said Jessie.

“Look here, just let me put these down, Geordie Baird will be needing his coat;” and she turned swiftly away and ran into the

kitchen, where she deposited the boy's present on the table.

"Oughtn't you to be at your tutor's, young man?" asked Mac, as soon as Jessie had disappeared, looking down at the boy.

"What's that to you?" returned the lad, with an angry flush.

"I don't like to see your father imposed upon, that's all," said Mac.

A remark which completely shut the boy up.

"Here, Geordie, and thank you very much," said Jessie, handing him his coat.

"Thank you, and good morning," said young Baird, and he went off abruptly and hurried over the lawn and the brae-side.

"That's a cub that wants a little licking!" remarked Mac.

"He's just a boy!" said Jessie, compassionately.

"Yes, I often wonder how one ever gets the degradation of having once been just a boy one's self! Now, here's my offering, take this basket and look in it. I've robbed the conservatory to an extent that will bring down vials of wrath upon my head."

"How lovely!" exclaimed Jessie, opening the basket and peeping into it; "I haven't seen such things for years, for centuries!"

"You've Mr. Harbuckle with you?" asked Mac.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"Oh, McQuade told our Allan Bell; and so my aunt sent this to Mrs. Bayliss with her kind regards and that sort of thing. We had a fine fish sent us yesterday from the Tay and as we knew that there's nothing but a haddie to be found in all Kirkhope town to-day, we thought it would come in handy. They told Bell to come over with it; but I upset that little arrangement, and brought it myself."

"Well, it's just awfully kind of Mrs. Caruthers to think of us," said Jessie. "Please tell her so."

"Then I'm to have no thanks, I suppose," said Mac, as if aggrieved.

"Why should you be thanked for pleasing yourself?" asked Jessie, with a very pronounced smile.

"I'll go away then, and never come back any more." And Mac, who had been bending down from his horse, straightened himself as if about to ride away that instant.

"I wish you had never come back at all!" said Jessie, turning her face away a little and showing the drawing of her throat and chin to very great advantage.

"Oh! *Can* you call yourself a truthful girl?" asked Mac, as if terribly shocked.

"I can't stand in this wind any longer," said Jessie. "Thank Mrs. Carruthers. Good-bye."

"Won't you ask me in?"

"No, indeed! Besides, I can't. Thank Mrs. Carruthers—good-bye," and she retreated, a few steps with the basket in her hand.

"Good-bye—but look here. I may come for the basket on Monday, mayn't I?" pleaded Mac.

"Good-bye," said Jessie, with decision. "I've nothing more to say to you. Thank Mrs. Carruthers very much! Good-bye!"

"Oh, thank *me* a little, just a little!"

But the inexorable Jessie only shook her head.

"I wish you'd go away!" she said.

"All right then! But remember:

"How merrily lives a fair young knight,  
Who---et cetera, et cetera;"

and taking her at her word, he turned his horse towards the path by the rhododendrons and rode off; but not without turning once or twice; and the last time he turned he fancied he saw the top of Jessie's head just outside the door.

As soon as he was out of sight, Jessie was

sorry she had not kept him chattering there a little longer.

“Why did I send him away? What possessed me?” she asked herself.

Who can tell? Such are the ways of girls.

“Jessie! Jessie! For heaven’s sake, child, shut that door!” she heard her aunt calling; but John Harbuckle, who was at that moment leaving the dining-room, caught Miss Jessie taking a furtive last look round the corner.

“Who is the young man?” he asked his sister the next time they were alone.

“Oh! they’re only playing!” said Mrs. Bayliss. “Jessie will play!”

“A dear girl! But very different from her mother!” thought John Harbuckle. “My Jessie seldom played.”

While Jessie had been alternately tormenting and delighting her lovers, and Alison had been busy about household matters, poor uncle John had been having a very bad little quarter of an hour with his sister Mary.

At first Mrs. Bayliss had been dignified, then tearful, then reproachful, then indignant, now she cut him to the heart by asking him how he could tear her away from her husband’s grave in the cemetery on the other side of the river: then she tapped his nerves by the

contempt with which she spoke of the City, his City, his dear London City, the object of his tenderest, most ideal affection, and by the ruthless way in which she tried to set their long, past childhood, around which he had fondly thrown a softening haze, in the hardest, crudest, most realistic light.

“ Well well, Mary,” said John at last, “ if you find that you really can’t be happy in——”

“ I can be happy nowhere!” she exclaimed.

“ If you find you really can’t be comfortable in London”—with an emphasis on the changed adjective—

“ I don’t call Tower Hill London—you must know it’s quite out of the London world.”

“ Why, then, you can take a little place near Woolwich, where you can have as many military friends as you like. I am sorry that civilians are so——”

“ They’re detestable to me; they have no manners! It’s been a grief to me all my life through that I am so unfortunately connected with City people. I hoped when I married my poor James that I had done with the City altogether; but alas! there was the same dreadful commercial element in his character, too, poor fellow; he would think he understood business: that was the terrible mistake he made. Poor Arthur’s failure and

death were thrown away upon him. Although I'm sure I don't know what could have made him so eager for business ; I'm sure I can conscientiously say I always tried my hardest to set him against it."

"There I quite believe you," said John, dryly. "How is it, then, that you are still so anxious to keep on this losing concern?"

"John, how can you dare—how can you," she sobbed, "how can you-d-dare to ask me such a question? Don't you suppose that if I'd have been with him on a sinking ship I'd have g-g-gone down with him? But you can't understand; you can't enter into the feelings of married people, you're a bachelor!"

"And necessarily a brute," put in John.

"I didn't mean that," said Mary, through her tears; "I only meant that unmarried people can't understand married ones. And I was never easy to understand—there was but one man who ever did understand me, and now he's gone!"

Mary began wandering aimlessly up and down the dining-room, pausing now and then to gaze at the precious books of the late Captain which were to be found all over the house in a way both irritating and affecting to her brother, who sat bending towards the fire with something like tears in his eyes, feeling

very much tempted to offer his all to throw after what had been already lost.

"I think, Mary, I'll try and get a nap." he said at length, when he felt that the prowling of his sister was almost more than he could bear.

"Very well," assented Mary, as if nothing on earth were of the slightest consequence to her, and as her brother slowly rose and crossed the room she never so much as turned towards him.

"Poor Mary!" sighed John Harbuckle to himself as he gently closed the door behind him.

It was at that very moment that he caught sight of Jessie peering round the corner. He passed on along the corridor to his own room without speaking to her. He had heard talking and laughing and the ringing of a horse's hoofs. He understood what it all meant pretty well.

"She, too, doesn't want to go, I suppose," he said; "but this time I must be firm. It won't do; they mustn't be allowed to ruin themselves. If I can help it they shall not."

So he carried out his programme in spite of all opposition. Before he left for London on Tuesday evening he had arranged for the sale of the farm, the letting of the house, the

satisfying of the man at Glasgow, and the carrying on of the house-keeping until Cauldknowe could be left.

The feeble little sunbeam that had so tenderly encircled Alison as she returned thanks for her first success was the harbinger of many others that struggled through the dark grey clouds until they gained strength and numbers sufficient to chase the long winter away altogether.

The sun shone on Birrendale ; the sky grew bright, the tops of the dark evergreens became brilliant with new growth ; the stream was in good order for fishing and Mac Carruthers, who had haunted its banks when the foaming river was the colour of terra-cotta, now appeared to dwell there in perpetuity, and Mac was an uncommonly successful fisherman. When others had been all day at work and had taken nothing, Mac would come down for a quarter of an hour, and charm a dozen or so of trout or herling into his basket, and when never a salmon had been seen in the stream for weeks Mac would be sure to land the first that managed to escape the nets at the river's mouth, and to leap the "calls," by the mill dams.

There was generally now a dish of toothsome herlings—a delicious little pinked-flesh fish peculiar, so they say, to the border streams, up-

on Mrs. Bayliss's breakfast table whenever the water was at all in order.

"How do you get them?—other people don't!" asked Jessie, one day.

"Oh," said Mac, gaily, "we've made a little arrangement, it's 'Whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad'—and I whistle and they just come. They like me to catch them, that's the fact of it."

"Silly little herlings!" said Jessie.

"Not at all," said Mac, "they know I catch them a great deal better than other people do. Besides, think of the honour of being eaten by you! Happy little herlings, I should say!"

In those days Mac and Jessie saw a good deal of each other; not that Mac used to stay fishing at the braefoot by the hour together, but that he used to come pretty nearly every day.

Was it all play between them?

Mac Carruthers would just then have found life rather sad if it had not been for that little bit of fishing, in spite of his own great stores of strong vitality.

His cousin, Alec Carruthers, was in delicate health, consumption had been feared at one time. He was a few years younger than Mac, whom he regarded as one of the most splendid beings this world has ever seen, and without exception the grandest nurse.

"Make haste back ; I weary so when you're away!" were generally his last words when Mac bade him good-bye.

It was depressing in the house. No sooner was Mac on horse-back, or in the dog-cart, on his way to Jessie, than he felt a violent reaction ; playing with Jessie, if it were play, was simply the most delicious experience that Mac Carruthers had ever yet known. It was quite as delightful to Jessie. She always knew when Mac was at the foot of that brae. A sort of instinct I suppose it was that told her ; for Mac came at all manner of odd times ; just when he could best get free to leave Muirhead.

"I shall cry when you take me away from here, I know I shall !" Jessie used to say very often to Alison, but never to Mac ; oh no, never to Mac ! At least not in those days, just after John Harbuckle had gone home.

"For," said she to herself, "men are naturally always too conceited, without being flattered like that ! and besides—besides—I really couldn't tell him ! How could I ?"

"Well yes, I don't know how it is, but I really am an uncommonly lucky beggar in other things beside catching salmon and herring," Mac said to Jessie one day.

She had come down the brae just as the sun

was setting, and the red beams had fallen on her bright hair and made it so luminous that Mac turning round at the sound of her footsteps, had been struck almost blind by it ; so he declared, with how much truth it is not for me to say.

“I can’t see to fish any longer,” he had said, and so they both strolled about the banks and talked. Then it was that Jessie had asked him how he managed to succeed when others failed ; then it was he had gone on about being “a lucky beggar.”

“Lucky !” said Jessie ; “I always understood you were a signal failure ! Every one except your cousin Alec says so !”

“Ah ! but that’s just the luck of it !” he answered. “I’m always making what other people call ‘failures’ (relatives you know, always think you ought to be able to make bricks without either straw or clay, their opinions don’t count) ; but the odd part of it is, my failures are always better to me than other people’s successes are to them. I’m like the Chinese tumbling toys, throw me down which way you like I always right myself. For instance, you may say, my not passing for the Civil Service was a failure. Granted ; but then if I had passed I might never have come down here and seen you.”

"That might have been just as well for both of us," said Jessie.

"For you perhaps, but certainly not for me," said Mac, fervently. "Indeed," he went on, "when I think how nearly I was not going to a certain ever-memorable ball, I feel quite frightened. But there was my luck again, you see! Well, then, if I hadn't failed, my cousin Alec would not have had the benefit of my devoted care all the winter, and might have been in a consumption by this time; you see what a fine thing both to myself and others my 'failure,' as my multitudinous relatives persist in calling it, has already turned out! I say *already*," and he suddenly looked up at Jessie, with that merry, merry twinkle of his own in his eyes; but somehow, that twinkle softened a moment after, in a way that made Jessie's colour rise.

"I say *already*, because—" and he slightly hesitated—"who knows what happiness—what—what—that is, as it was the excuse of my meeting you, I can never be thankful enough for it, I mean."

"You might have said the same, and I dare say you did say the same, to the lovely Viennese girls, to a dozen of them at Nice. You wouldn't have gone to Nice if you hadn't failed, you know;" said

Jessie. "That was another good thing, wasn't it?"

"I admit Nice was very jolly, and that they were perfection. But then I don't care for perfection. I don't consider you perfect, far from it. You won't say that you're sorry you're going to London?" the last sentence rather wistfully.

"Why should I?" asked Jessie; but not looking up, although he was looking down.

"You are sorry a wee bit? Just a wee bit?" said he, lowering his voice. "Come, make haste and tell me! There are Mrs. Bayliss and your cousin half way down the brae. Not just a wee bit?"

"Oh, nonsense! Nonsense! Nonsense!" cried Jessie, rousing herself. "Good-bye! Good-bye! That is, you'd better come and say 'how d'you do?' to aunt;"

And these two ingenuous young people, walked towards the others as if they had only that very instant met by the merest chance.

"No doubt," observed Alison to Jessie later; "no doubt it was only the sunset that had given you both such a glowing colour. But you looked very nice; I liked to see you—both of you!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### ARNOLD BIRKETT'S "ATTACK."

IT was again Monday evening; just one week after Arnold Birkett had landed at St. Katherine's Docks.

Arnold Birkett was at the Tavistock hotel, in his room, which was heated up to the utmost of the stove's power.

He had been in that room for several days, with a bad attack of ague and fever.

Ague and fever had been following each other with dismal monotonous alternation, tossing their wretched victim to and fro from the Arctic pole to the burning desert. They were accompanied moreover, by a complication of other ailments, each one of which would have reduced even a cheerful man in cheerful circumstances to abject melancholy. As for Arnold Birkett, alone or with no other companion than an uneasy conscience and a bitter past, the only wonder to himself was how he managed to live through it at all.

Through it all, through the icy cold, the

burning fiery furnace, the blackness of darkness he called “liver,” one deed, one evil deed, for ever haunted him.

It never left him ; it seemed not a memory merely, but a thing with eyes. It never moved, never varied. Morning, noon, and night, there it was, the same, always the same, always staring at him

But his own attitude towards it changed often.

“God left me. The Devil tempted me. Fate was against me. I sinned. How could I help it ?”

He had seen no one except the hotel people since he had been ill. They came, waited on him, and went away.

By Monday evening, when he was able to be up, he felt that if he could not talk to some human being he must go mad and kill himself. He had known men who had done so ; men who had been for months up an African river without seeing a white face, until solitude had been too much for them and they had blown their brains out. He heard the noises of the world without, the clatter of street traffic, the ringing of church bells, the many signs and sounds of multitudinous life all round. “It’s awfully maddening,” he said, “this solitude in the midst of this great thronged City !—it’s

more dreadful than the deadly stillness and utter loneliness of my African river. If I could only walk about the streets and see people it would be something!"

But just then, to move, to walk seemed almost as impossible as to fly to this man leaning back in his arm-chair with his feet outstretched on another.

"If I could see John Harbuckle!" he said, presently. "Yes, that's what I must do! I must write to John Harbuckle, I'll send down a messenger, and ask John Harbuckle to come up at once. They could be back in an hour. In the whole of this big City he's the only man I can trust. I can trust him. He's a Christian if there isn't another in the world! I must see John Harbuckle."

Then he let the pen which he had taken up fall from between his fingers that suddenly had grown nerveless.

"I can't put it on paper!" he said, sinking back again into the chair and covering his face with one hand. "I can't do it! yet I must see John Harbuckle. I shall go mad if I don't!"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," said Arnold Birkett, wearily.

"A gentleman downstairs would be glad to know how you are, sir."

Birkett looked at the card the man gave him.

“ Ask him to be good enough to come up.”

And a few minutes later in came Mr. Tildesley, whom Arnold Birkett seemed as delighted to see, as if they had been the oldest and most intimate friends for years.

Birkett, was on his feet with amazing celerity.

“ Well, this is a providence ! ” he exclaimed, a smile trying hard to break over his yellow face. “ I haven’t seen a creature since the attack came on ! How are you ? What shall I order ? Here, this is a comfortable chair. Do you smoke cigars ? All right, then ; there’s a brand you don’t often come across ! ” and with true colonial hospitality he made Mr. Tildesley exceedingly welcome ; but no attention could adequately express his pleasure at the sight of some one to talk to.

“ This is a bad affair,” said Tildesley, sympathetically. “ I rather wondered why you didn’t give me a call. I had to meet a man from Melbourne here to-night, and they told me you had been laid up. Usual dose I suppose ? You tropical birds always get it when you come home, don’t you ? ”

“ Precious stiff dose, this time ! said Birkett. And having an immense amount of talk to get

rid of, he began a very minute description of his late sufferings.

"Ah, you want taking in hand!" said Mr. Tildesley, reflectively.

"Yes, by the undertaker," returned Birkett.

"Tush! That's what you all say. You all want to order your coffins as soon as you get home, I've had some experience, I can tell you, I know so many colonists. Get to work! Get to work! That's better than all your nostrums, and your doctors, and your undertakers."

"So I used to say on the Coast. I *did* work there and no mistake.

Then they drifted into talk about African produce, Mincing Lane, the City in general, and grew to a certain extent confidential.

Arnold Birkett, once started on the resources of Africa, could go on and on for ever; so could Mr. Tildesley on Colonial brokering. Oh, dear and lovely "shop," how sweet it is to all of us!

It is to be hoped that Mr. Tildesley had an indulgent wife at home, because it was late before the two men parted.

Arnold Birkett did not write to John Harbuckle that night.

After Mr. Tildesley had left, Arnold Birkett did not feel that craving for the sight of John

Harbuckle that had seized him earlier in the evening. He did not write to him.

Thoroughly aroused and, for the time being, apparently cured by companionship, an immense hopefulness took possession of him.

"It may yet be possible," he exclaimed. "Why not strive for the possible? I will! Let me see if I have a chance; before I see her or him. I'll put John Harbuckle off for a while. "If we meet, well and good. If not, having waited so long, I can wait a little longer until I see how things will go. It is possible! and what is possible must be done."

Mr. Tildesley found Arnold Birkett decidedly interesting, he hardly knew why; perhaps on several accounts, perhaps the most decided being that he saw business advantages in the connection to both himself and his new friend.

When Arnold Birkett was better he was frequently in Mr. Tildesley's office; and after the lapse of some time, Mr. Tildesley asked him to come down to "Crow's Nest" on the following Sunday; an invitation which was accepted without hesitation, for Mr. Birkett felt dull alone at the Tavistock even when in comparative health, and if he had friends in London it was certain he never called upon any of them.

Charing Cross Station was looking very desolate on the Sunday morning when Arnold Birkett took his ticket for Lambrooke.

He was the solitary occupant of the first-class smoking carriage by which he travelled down. Most of the persons he saw on the different platforms he passed carried Bibles, Prayerbooks, or church music in their hands, for it was too early in the season for the Sunday excursionist, and that part of the line is always eminently respectable.

Half an hour brought him to the flourishing suburb of Lambrooke, where he found no less than six cabs, including one hansom, in waiting ; so populous is Lambrooke.

Hailing the hansom he was rapidly driven along a fine broad road, bordered by detached villa residences, every one of which bore a name of its own. The houses were as different as their names : “Plinlimmon” had a classic portico in stucco and straight uncompromising lines ; “Dorden” next door, was a glorified old English farm-house with carved barge-boards and white and brown horizontal timbers ; “The Chesnuts” was a glowing red-brick Elizabethan residence ; “Inglenook,” a mass of trellis work, soon to be covered with climbing roses ; “Mossy Bank,” a hideous square block of pale bricks, that had an un-

comfortable slack-baked look about them,—and so on *ad infinitum*. It was indeed a work for a stranger to find among those divers houses the one he was seeking.

The taste for gardening, however, seemed proper to all the residents of these various abodes. Every garden was in perfect order, and showed, more or less, a wealth of primroses, daffodils and hyacinths, with here and there an almond tree in full bloom.

Mr. Tildesley's house, "Crow's Nest," was a good way down the road. It was a not un-picturesque red brick house, which had been quite large enough when there had been a good many at home.

Nothing about the place showed any striking individuality on the owner's part. The prim orderliness of the front garden was fully sustained by the arrangements within. There were very few things in the house that one did not know very well, from the door mat to the drawing-room paper, all was familiar to any Londoner; but it struck Mr. Birkett, who had not been inside a private house in the suburbs of London for many years, as an immense advance upon what he had remembered to have seen in dwellings of the same class when last he was among them; and he remarked to himself that

there had been a good deal of levelling up since his time.

Mr. and Mrs. Tildesley at home were very like their surroundings ; they differed little from their neighbours, but their neighbours and themselves had also been submitted to a large extent to the levelling up process.

Mrs. Tildesley was a woman no longer young, but still not distinctly old. There was something just a little hard about her features ; but she had kindly, pleasant, and truly hospitable ways.

"The spring would be coming on beautifully if it were not for these cold winds," Mr. Tildesley remarked, as soon as they were seated at table.

"Yes," said Birkett, "and if I didn't feel it so keenly I should think the spring a delightful change. In the tropics one wearies of the continual luxuriance of the vegetation ; one never sees the trees without leaves.

"Then England must look very bare to you just now," said Mrs. Tildesley.

"Bare but interesting. I could but notice as I came along how interesting everything seemed," said Birkett, with a trifle of sadness not without its effect upon his host and hostess.

Mrs. Tildesley thought that he, although he was no longer a young man, was, like the trees,

interesting, and had still fine eyes, bordered by those very appealing charms, long, if now rather broken, eye-lashes.

She was not by several the only woman who had admired those dark eyes and lashes ; they had in their time, done a considerable amount of damage.

“Then is there no spring in Africa ?” Mrs. Tildesley asked, with a little extra kindness.

“No. We’ve only the rains and dries”—and he began to talk at large with ease about natives and palm oil, palm nuts, gold dust, ivory, ginger—and so on ; but not a word did Mr. Birkett vouchsafe as to his family or to his domestic concerns.

“I wonder if you’re married ?” thought Mrs. Tildesley.

“Are you married ?” she asked a length, after she had perplexed herself on the subject for some time.

“A widower, unhappily,” said Birkett with a sigh.

“You may well say unhappily,” put in Mr. Tildesley ; “I don’t know a more wretched condition for a man to be in, and I can speak from experience. You found me in a frightful state, didn’t you my dear ?” turning to his wife ; “I’m sure I couldn’t answer for what might

have happened if Mrs. Tildesley hadn't taken pity on me. Any children?"

"One," said Birkett, "we had one little girl, that's all."

"And she, your daughter, did not go out to Africa with you?" asked Mrs. Tildesley, tentatively, with evident interest.

"Oh no! I couldn't have run so great a risk. That is one of the penalties of living in such a climate, you must be separated from your children; your domestic life is ruined."

"Miss Birkett is not in London?" asked Mrs. Tildesley.

"Oh dear no; she's staying with relatives in the North!" said Birkett, with so much decision that no one could possibly have told from his manner that he had but the vaguest notion where his daughter was, or indeed whether she were yet in this world at all, but had made a perfectly random shot. Perfectly? Well, that is putting the case too strongly; he may have had something to go upon; or perhaps he wanted to be able to answer the question that he may have thought would be, as it was, the next.

"Are you from the North?"

"Well, to tell you the truth I can hardly say what place has the honour of owning me," he answered, "I was born in London; but I've

lived a good deal in the provinces. My father was a Cheshire man. To myself I seem to belong now more to the West Coast of Africa than to any other part of the globe. About twenty years ago I was living in London, since then my visits have been few and far between. I find London wonderfully changed. A great deal cleaner, taller, and altogether finer than it used to me."

"Ah, there was a great deal of business done behind the cobwebby old windows, though!" put in Mr. Tildesley, regretfully.

"You find us improved, I hope?" said Mrs. Tildesley.

"On the whole, yes," said Mr. Birkett, as if he were by no means sure; "I suppose I must say yes."

"Why do you hesitate?" asked Mrs. Tildesley, looking towards her guest with increasing interest.

"To be perfectly candid," said he, smiling, "and not to put too fine a point upon it, public opinion seems to have developed what I can only characterise as a topsyturviness—if you will pardon the expression—that is really most perplexing to me. Everything that used to be wrong is now right; much that used to be objectionable is now the correct thing. I really don't know my way

about at all. I am continually being taken by surprise——”

“ And shocked ? ” asked Mrs. Tildesley.

“ Especially by the young ladies ? ” added Mrs. Tildesley’s husband.

“ I’ve gone into society very little since I’ve returned to London, my health having suffered so greatly from the change of climate ; but I must admit that the modern girl astonishes me very much ; indeed, she is quite incomprehensible to me, and is as far from my ideal English girl as Lambrooke is from Cape Coast Castle. She seems to delight in most things my mother and my wife would have condemned. I can only say I don’t understand her.”

“ Nor I,” asserted Mrs. Tildesley. “ So you see, Mr. Birkett, there may be still a few people left to agree with you. I assure you, you will find our old rector and our doctor, indeed most of our circle down here, still walking in the good old ways. Your daughter, I hope, has not imbibed modern notions ? It must make one so anxious when one is away, you cannot be sure what dreadful ideas are being instilled into the poor children’s minds in your absence.”

“ She is in safe hands,” said Arnold Birkett, promptly ; but not without a strange feeling of solemnity.

After Mrs. Tildesley had gone, the two men sat talking for some time, and then went into the drawing-room, where they had coffee.

Mrs. Tildesley could not have been quite a common-place person, for her coffee tasted like coffee, an achievement by no means to be met with every day.

"I really must compliment you on your coffee; it is the best I have tasted since I left Paris early in the spring," said Arnold Birkett.

Mrs. Tildesley smiled. Whether intentionally or not, Mr. Birkett had soothed a little weakness of hers. She liked the details of her house-keeping to be appreciated. She took an interest in those who noticed such things.

"I always look upon the making of fine coffee as a rare accomplishment; my poor wife possessed it," he said, as if encouraged to confidence by the friendly smile.

"Has she been dead long?" asked Mrs. Tildesley, with sympathy.

"Nearly eight years."

"Eight years! Not many widowers are as constant as that; that is to say, they generally marry again very soon."

"The very best thing they can do," said Mr. Birkett, hurriedly, his host having recently confided to him that he had married again

within the year, “that is, generally speaking ; but, of course, there are exceptions to that rule as well as to all others.”

“And you are an exception, at least for the present. But your daughter, perhaps, will be able to make a home for you? What is her age ?”

“Why—really how time flies!—she must be nearly twenty now. Mr. Tildesley, I see you want your siesta ; don't mind me.”

“Not at all ! Not at all !” exclaimed Mr. Tildesley, opening his eyes with a start. “A cigar in the summer-house is all I want. You smoke I know.”

So the two men went out together and talked for the rest of the afternoon, greatly to the satisfaction of both of them.

In the evening, Mr. Tildesley went to the station with his guest, making an appointment with him for the next morning before they parted.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Tildesley to her husband on his return, as he drew his arm-chair up to the fire, “I like Mr. Birkett very much ; but——” significantly, “but——” still more significantly.

“But what, my dear?” asked Mr. Tildesley, looking across to his wife with some alarm.

“He is a man with a secret!” said the wife, oracularly.

“A secret! you don’t mean it?” said Mr. Tildesley, who had a profound belief in his wife’s knowledge of character, adjusted his spectacles the better to observe her expression.

“I do mean it,” she said with decision.

“Bless my soul! A secret! Why he’s told me all about himself! What he’s been doing, what he means to do, who are his bankers, in fact he’s laid all his plans before me and asked my advice; he’s told me all!”

“Not quite all, my dear,” said Mrs. Tildesley looking down on the book in her hand, as if it were the “Book of Fate” and she were reading out that sentence from it.

“Well of course no man tells you *all*,” said Mr. Tildesley, uneasily.

“In this case there is a very important item omitted.”

“How on earth can you tell? You wouldn’t say he was a returned convict, would you?”

“Certainly not. He looks you in the face, and, by the way, has very handsome eyes and long lashes.”

“Of course not. There’s no mistake about his having been out in Africa. H.—and R.—have done business with him for years. He

happened to mention their names so I went round to them, and asked all about him. Do you mean I am not to trust him?"

"I didn't say that," returned the wife, "I said *he has a secret.*"

"Oh well, I don't care if he has a hundred as long as I can safely do business with him. May I?"

"I should say so. The secret—for I'm sure there is one—is *a domestic secret.*"

"But he talked about his wife and daughter!"

"Yes—so he did; he talked about them just enough to tell me that the secret is in some way or another connected with them."

"Well—well, I suppose everybody who isn't a babbling fool has a secret somewhere. Birkett is by no means a fool; on the contrary I should give him credit for being a shrewd fellow."

"Only tolerably shrewd, but decidedly interesting."

"So I feel, although why he should be I can't quite make out," said Mr. Tildesley, with a slightly puzzled look.

"*It's the mystery*, my dear," said his wife, emphatically; and leaning back in her chair she turned over a page of a volume of "Good Words" as if she were engrossed in her book;

while her husband looked at her, as husbands should, with wonder almost approaching veneration ; so struck was he with this new proof of her sagacity and penetration.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THROUGH BIRRENDALE.

NOW to sell off the farm and to find a tenant for the house took some time, so that May was nearly over before Mrs. Bayliss and the girls were ready to go to London.

Their last few weeks in Birrendale were very pleasant to the girls.

The house was put into order, the pretty drawing-room, that the Captain and his wife had furnished with much care and a good deal of taste, was in daily use, and afternoon tea re-established on behalf of the visitors whose carriage wheels again cut up the grey shingle of the drive.

Mrs. Bayliss and the girls went out to pay a round of parting calls ; Mrs. Bayliss in new weeds of, if possible, a deeper depth of woe than even her last, the girls in new grey dresses and black velvet hats, hats that were exactly alike, only while in hers Jessie looked more lovely than ever, by no dint of wrestling could Alison's be subdued into

sitting properly on her head, although she almost wept over its obduracy.

On these occasions McQuade was sent down to the town for a horse and carriage, and Alison suffered many things during the drive from the insubordination of her own hat and from the aggravating way in which Jessie's kept its place, as well as from her mother's incessant quarrels with her horse ; for Mrs. Bayliss always insisted on driving.

Now it so happened that one morning, one very lovely morning, when the wooded ground above the Birren was a mass of primroses and when twenty kinds of spring flowers had been counted by Mac Carruthers on the banks along the river, it so happened that the Reverend Andrew Baird was going to a meeting of Presbytery at Allarbie, a town several miles inland and, knowing that Mrs. Bayliss had friends there, he very kindly suggested that she should let him drive her over to say Good-bye, as it was further than she would care to take the hack from Kirkhope.

Mrs. Bayliss as a rule detested Scotch ministers ; she was a woman who detested a good many persons and things ; but she made an exception now and then, and, as she held Mr. Baird to be almost as good as an English clergyman, she accepted the offer.

Before she left home she gave the girls a long list of commissions to execute in Kirk-hope, which was their nearest town.

Alison had a great deal of very strong filial affection; but I fear she was not sorry to see her mother depart. As for Jessie, she flung her arms round her cousin's waist and tried to make her dance through the hall, as they came away from the front door, after having carefully packed Mrs. Bayliss into the clergyman's chaise; but Alison was not a girl one could easily make dance unless the spirit of the thing possessed her, which it did not just then.

In two days more they were to leave Cauld-knowe.

“Now here’s the whole heavenly day before us!” cried Jessie, “and I’m just wild to get out. I feel I must have a real holiday! I’m up to anything! Only, Alie, you’re not half sympathetic! Why will you be so lumpy? Come along now! I’ll put your hat on for you and subdue it! We’ll just make ourselves look very nice, and go to the town by the river!”

“Then I’d far better stay at home! What do I know about ‘flies,’ and Maes and those kinds of creatures?” said Alison. “Oh! I weary so of that Mac! If you must flirt,

you might at least choose an interesting subject!"

"Ah! Interesting people don't run about wild in Birrendale!" said Jessie. "But, poor Mac! You're too hard on him! *I* don't find him so dreadfully dull."

"All young men are dull!" said Alison, sententiously. "Where can you find one who is a really charming companion, like, for instance, uncle John? Please don't pull my head off, it's my only one and I may want it in the City!"

By which exclamation you may perceive that Jessie was already at work upon Alison; she was in fact trying to make the plaits of her cousin's hair keep firmly in their places, but hitherto without success, and many severe tugs showed how desperately she was resolved to conquer.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed, savagely. "Ugh! Why will you do your hair in that flopperty style! Nothing short of driving a pin right through your skull would keep anything firmly on such a head as yours! Ugh! Shoo! Shah! *How* I despise a girl who can't do her hair! A girl who fails in her first duty as a feminine person! Ugh! Shoo! Why you might as well be a mere man!" And then came a series of more tugging and twistings

and groans and finally the entire re-adjustment of Alison's *coiffure*.

"There now! you look quite a distinguished person! you look like the great literary woman you are!" said Jessie, when the hair, which was very long and fine, was at last arranged to her satisfaction, and the hat firmly established thereon. "Why don't you set up as a pretty girl, Alison?"

"What's the good of pretending to be what you are not?" asked Alison, smiling, however, with genuine satisfaction, as she saw in the glass that for once she was looking really very nice.

"There's many a girl would set up for being a beauty with only half your store of good looks!" said Jessie, as she began her own toilet. "That's what makes me so angry with you! you don't know your own style!"

"Neither would you if you had half-a-dozen to choose from. It's all very well for you who've only one; but I'm a complicated being," said Alison, half in mirth, but her mirth had rather a serious under-current.

"And I'm a simple one—not to say a simpleton, I suppose!"

"Well, now," said Jessie after a while, "we're ready! Can't find your gloves? Oh,

well, there's a pair of mine! Come along, I'm just as full of friskiness as can be. Let's be off or something will happen to stop us."

And off they were in another minute.

Out of doors, the spring sun was shining brilliantly. Jessie seemed almost to fly as she and Alison crossed the lawn, which once more was a "smooth-shaven green," and down the brae-side, where myriads of flowers were blooming, and where the burn was tinkling in the pure air more gaily than ever.

The two girls paused an instant on the little grey bridge in the bright light, amid the delicious absence of all human sounds. Alison listened to the singing of the burn and the rapid flowing of the clear river, to-day so transparent, that every stone in its rocky bed was visible; Jessie to look this way and that in search of the well-known form of the haunter of the stream.

And there it was; fortunately on the town side of the bridge, so that they must needs pass it on their way.

Not alone, however, was Mac Carruthers to-day.

The two girls walked leisurely along the narrow path between the river and the banks that were now one tangle of luxuriant foliage and flowers. In a few minutes they came up

to the two young men; Mac in a rough brown tweed suit with a fine array of flies around his hard wide-awake; his companion still wearing an over-coat; and, although the day was warm, a china silk handkerchief.

“I’m glad to see you again, Mr. Carruthers,” said both the girls at once to the younger man, who was no other than Mac’s cousin, Alec.

“Thanks, I’m ever so much better,” said Alec, whose rod happened to be out of the water, and, laying it down he raised a long slender hand to his hat. “This is my first venture so far; but it won’t be my last;” he added, brightly, looking full at the girls. He was a very young man, hardly twenty, with a face so delicate that had it not been for the dark down on the upper lip it might almost have passed for a girl’s.

“And so you’re getting quite strong again?” asked Jessie.

“Yes,” said he “the sudden change from the South to Muirhead almost knocked me over; but I’m nearly well again now; thanks to Mac.”

“Look here, Alec,” said Mac, who had been standing on a ledge of rock close down by the river and who now came up to the others. “It’s simply absurd to fish in water that’s as

bright as glass ! I've had enough of it. What's your feeling?"

"I've had enough too," returned Alec ; "it's not a bit of good trying when the water doesn't serve."

"It never does serve," said Jessie, "either it's too muddy or else it's too clear ; either it's too deep or it's too shallow. It's never right."

"Still he contrives to bring me home something every day," said Alec, indicating his cousin by shrugging the shoulder next him.

"Well, it's certainly not right to-day, so I don't see why I shouldn't go down to the town with you, if you don't mind. I want to see about several things," said Mac to the girls.

"All right," said Alec, "I'll take the tackle back, and drive home in the trap."

"No, no, don't you bother to take the things to the village, I dare say Miss Bayliss will let us leave them at the house until to-morrow. You will let me, won't you ? Then I'll be back in two two's."

And hastily gathering together the tackle, he fled away with it as if running for a race.

"Doesn't Mac run well ?" said Alec, looking after his hero with undisguised admiration. "I do think," he went on with a naïve earnest simplicity quite his own, "I *do* think that

take him altogether Mac is one of—no I won't qualify it—is the finest fellow I ever met. He's been awfully good to me. I don't know what I'd have done without him."

"He's very kind," said Alison.

"Yes," said Alec, "he's strong, and kind and tender, like strong men who are great and good always are."

Alec as he spoke was still looking after his cousin, so he did not see Jessie's expression.

"And you enjoyed Nice very much?" asked Alison; silence having fallen upon Jessie.

"Oh yes; it quite set me up. I feel another creature now. It was so good to see Mac enjoying himself. Everything was delightful to him."

"Especially the girls, I hear," said Jessie.

"They're just lovely," said Alec, but only with the same sort of enthusiasm, with which he might have spoken of a tree or flower. "Mac talked to them a great deal, of course, but I don't think he left his heart behind him; and I'm sure I didn't; I wearied for this," he said, turning to the river a little, with a certain pathetic fondness, "I wearied for this—this is perfect—perfect!" he repeated, with a little extra ring of his northern "r." "Here he comes back again."

"There, you can't say I've been long," cried

Mac, rushing up, flushed and panting, "Now, old fellow, come a wee bit of the way with us. Isn't it a jolly morning? It will do you good."

"Oh, well, I think I will," said Alec.

Mac Carruthers was perhaps as ingenious a fellow as ever breathed, but for all that, the reason of his wishing Alec to go with them was not anxiety for his cousin's welfare, but to get rid both of Alec and Alison, that he and Jessie might be undisturbed.

Alison was perfectly aware of this; but as young Carruthers rather interested her and was content, indeed delighted, to talk about Birrendale and Border legends, all the way along, she had a pleasant walk. Alec, she thought, was much more intelligent than Mac, being a devourer of books of all sorts.

As for the two others, they managed to keep so far a-head, that their presence was scarcely felt.

"Did you see that fish jump? Aren't they lively this morning," was Jessie's first remark to Mac, as she left Alison. "If we hadn't come by just when we did, you'd have had him; little does he think what benefactors we've been to him?"

"There's no catching them when they jump like that," said Mac. "There goes a herling! A yard straight out of the water! No, I

shouldn't have tried. It is no good trying to do what can't be done. I'm not the sort of fellow to work without hope," he added, his tone growing more serious. "Give me hope and I hold on like a bull-dog. It is a very sweet morning. I know it is," he went on, looking at the beautiful deep red light on the water running swiftly over its brown rocky bed; "but I feel sad. I can't help it, I feel sad."

"Sad?" echoed Jessie,

"Yes—you're going away."

"And you? You'll be going away too," and Jessie dropped into a quieter tone than usual.

There was a pause before Mac answered:

"I suppose so."

"And where?"

"I haven't a notion," said Mac. "I wish I had. Now Alec's so much better I can't sponge upon my uncle much longer; although I don't suppose he'd turn me out, as I really do believe I've saved Alec's life. He was a good deal worse than they would believe, but I think he's getting all right now." He paused again. "You hate being poor, I know; you've told me so a hundred times," he added.

This assertion sounded like a question. Jessie hesitated an instant and then asked another:

“Don’t you?”

Her voice was low but clear, with the clearness that comes of feeling rigorously suppressed.

“I never did until lately; I never cared,” he replied, passionately. “I hate it intensely to-day; I never hated anything so much in my life.”

Mac was a rather primitive being. Civilization had not penetrated very much deeper than the garments with which he clothed his limbs and his mind. He loved and hated with direct and simple fervour; although he sometimes found it necessary to wear over these emotions a slight covering; the same, he fancied as other people wore.

“I hate it,” he went on, with sudden fierceness, and with broken sentences. “I hate it to-day! I generally kill what I hate! But poverty’s a thing that takes so much killing—it takes time and I want to know my fate to-day. I may never have another chance.” There was a great cloud of trouble in his honest eyes as he spoke.

Jessie tried to say a word or two but could not.

“It wouldn’t be right of me to—to—that is, of course it wouldn’t be honourable of me to ask you to make promises when I haven’t

a farthing beyond the hundred and fifty a-year my parents left me. Of course you must be free, of course you must be! but how can I bear the idea of your going to London—and perhaps meeting all sorts of rich men—and not even being quite sure that *you* (I won't say *we*, for I know I haven't) that *you* haven't been merely playing with me. I can't bear it!"

"It has not been all play : not quite all," said Jessie. To Mac's ears, most lovely words, most sweetly spoken.

"You care for me one wee bit ?" he asked, the sunshine of hope and love chasing the shadows from his face, as the sun in heaven was from the bright wavelets of the Birren water.

He turned to Jessie with the question :

"You care for me one wee bit ?"

"Just the least in the world," she answered, under her voice, with the loveliest blush and smile.

She certainly had the most exquisite mouth ; it always had been difficult to resist.

Mac (the others being at that moment behind a piece of jutting sand-stone crag) stooped and kissed it.

"Only the least in the world, Jessie ?"

"Well—" murmured Jessie, but could get no farther.

"Ah! I know! I know! That's all I need to know."

Now after these two young people had come to this understanding, there was still over a mile to stroll before they reached Kirkhope bridge; so that they had a little time to recover themselves enough to try and pretend to the world that nothing had happened, and that they were only simple ordinary mortals, and had not recently joined the superfine order of engaged couples.

At the foot of the bridge they waited for the others to come up to them. And there, would you believe it? they very nearly had a quarrel. For said Mac:

"Then, after all, Jessie, you are not going to marry Mr. John Harbuckle, who I am told is so fond of you?"

"Oh Mac! How horrible! Why he was my mother's lover! He's a hundred and fifty-six, if he's a day!"

So it came to nothing; they did not quarrel that day. Alec left them at the foot of the bridge and went back along the banks.

Alison did not require to be told what had happened; the way Mac looked down at Jessie, and kept close to her as they all went along the little cobble-stoned turning that led from

the Birren to the town, was quite enough for her.

In a minute or two they had passed between two rows of small houses that once had been red, but which were now covered with a green mould, and came out on to the irregular coast line, all bays and gulfs, so to speak, of the High Street of Kirkhope, or “Kirkup” as the vernacular hath it.

It was market day, the streets were crowded with stalls and people. Instead of the noise of the rushing Birren and its many “caulds” or weirs, there was a great and mighty clattering of brass-tipped wooden clogs, and much squeaking of pigs ; and an organ jerking out the semiquavers of : “Within a mile of Edinboro’ town.”

Jessie let Alison pay all the bills and do all the business ; she was far too much excited to attend to such things.

So Jessie and Mac were left to amuse themselves ; which they did very well, indeed ; extracting an immense amount of pleasure from the stalls, from the local views in the stationer’s window, from the picture of a giant mangold-wurzel at the seedsman’s, from the little pigs struggling under the netting in the rows of carts, from the women in sun bonnets and the girls in grand, fashion-

able hats with—oh such flowers! but more particularly, from a selection of haberdashery set out in heaps on the road, over which a young man was presiding with the air of the typical charming peer at a bazaar; very greatly delighted if you laid out a penny with him, but apparently quite unconcerned as to the amount of business done.

“Gloves! By Jove!” exclaimed Mac.  
“How much?”

“Pennies a pair!” replied the young salesman, with an enchanting smile, gracefully measuring off four yards of black tape.

“Jessie, gloves a penny a pair! What a revelation! How possible life becomes when one hears of gloves a penny a pair,” said Mac, as they turned away.

“If one could only wear them?” sighed Jessie.

“What a delightful world this would be if it weren’t so dear,” said Mac, ruefully. “How happy we might be if gloves at a penny a pair were wearable. Let’s go into Beattie’s and eat cookies!”

“I thought we were going to be very economical,” said Jessie.

“What on to-day? I’ll begin the day after to-morrow! The moment your train has started. You said Mrs. Bayliss had gone

to Allarbie? Now I want to ask you a question; don't you think filial affection is a lovely thing? of course you do—you feel it towards your aunt——”

“Not quite,” said Jessie.

“Well, you do what she tells you?”

“Oh yes. When I can't help it.”

“Don't you think it would be a beautiful and touching thing if you were to go to Allarbie to fetch her; instead of leaving her to the uncertain care of the Rev. Andrew, who may chance to forget all about her when he gets discussing the iniquities of heritors with his reverend brethren?”

“You're just daft!” cried Jessie. “You've been standing in the sun till you've got a stroke. How am I to get to Allarbie, I should like to know?”

“Very simply,” said Mac; “I'll run over to the ‘Blue-bell’ and get a trap and a horse that'll go, while you give your cousin the benefit of your advice, and hurry up the shopping; and I'll drive you over to fetch Mrs. Bayliss, and won't she be pleased by your filial attention! It's a splendid day. There's no cap on Criffel. We'll go. We *must* go! I *must* take you one good long drive! We *must* have a holiday to-day!”

“Nonsense! Nonsense!” said Jessie, re-

provably, but with manifest pleasure at the idea. A good long drive with Mac on such a day! It was too tempting! and Jessie was wild enough for a good many things at that moment.

“Don’t say a word to Alison till I’ve got the trap,” said Mac, reading permission in Jessie’s face.

“It’s just madness!” said Jessie; but without hesitating another second, Mac dashed across the cobble stones and disappeared within the court-yard of the inn.

“It’s just madness!” Jessie repeated; but Mac was beyond recall. A moment afterwards, Alison came out of the grocer’s, and went to the “fleshers,” and then to the “cloggers,” Jessie following her and standing by her, looking very much excited.

“What’s become of him?” asked Alison, under her voice, as she put down the money for the bill she was paying.

“He’s gone quite mad,” whispered Jessie. “He’s going to drive us over to Allarbie to fetch aunt home. He’s getting a trap at the ‘Blue-bell.’”

“Jessie!” exclaimed Alison, with indignant astonishment, “I’ll not go with you!”

“You’ll have to, or I’ll just go without you!” said Jessie.

"Jessie, this is foolery!" said Alison, sternly.

"I don't care whether it is or isn't, but you'll have to come," said Jessie.

"I'm very much annoyed," said Alison, sharply. "What do you mean by serving me such a trick? I'm just mad with you!"

"That's right! Then we're all of us mad together, and what could be nicer?" said the incorrigible Jessie, flippantly, but withal looking quite different from her ordinary self.

"I'll tell him I object!" said Alison, with dignity.

"Tut! Tut! Tut! Do you think he'll mind *you!*?" asked Jessie, with a touch of sarcasm quite unusual, that irritated Alison almost beyond endurance. She turned away from the bright hazel eyes that were dancing with wild excitement under the brim of Jessie's hat. She was too proud to reply. No girl could well think less of herself than did Alison, but it was one thing to feel nobody, and quite another to be told so by somebody else.

The trap was brought round. Alison offered no protest, but went, feeling in the way, and a good deal hurt.

"A pretty girl is a law to herself, I suppose," said Alison. "Well, they are evi-

dently just engaged, so perhaps they're not accountable for their actions."

For all that, Alison felt disposed to cry when they started, as she sat alone on the back seat.

But kind Mother Nature soon came and consoled her

The sunshine and warmth cheered her ; a delightful two hours were before her, in which she should be required neither to speak to any mortal, nor to listen to any, except such of the rural sounds around her as she heard above the grinding of the wheels. This was always a very great treat to Alison.

Her little paper on "Our Border Towers" was published now ; its appearance had strangely endeared the neighbourhood to her.

As the ground rose and Mac slackened his speed the landscape below came gradually into her sight.

As each well-known feature appeared, the knowledge she was gazing on the scene perhaps for the last time came to her, and smote her with keen pain. When they stopped at the little toll-house on the highest point of the road, the whole of the dear familiar landscape was visible to her. Down below were the spires of the little town peeping out of thick woods ; beyond it, on

one hand the broad Solway, guarded by the dim outlines of English Skiddaw and his attendant hills, hiding the lakes of Cumberland ; on the other, the open sea was shining softly in the noon-tide below—its lovely broken coast-line, stretching far away beyond where great Criffel, the only Scotch mountain all round, confronted sea and land in unchallenged supremacy.

“Oh !” said Alison, gazing down upon it all, “I cannot leave you, my borderland, I cannot leave you, Birrendale,” and the tears welled up in her eyes and almost blinded her.

She wanted to make those others stop awhile, and let her gaze on, and take a long farewell ; but she felt she could not speak to them then ; what was there in common between her and them ?

She let them drive on, while she strained her eyes to hold the view, and tried to force her memory to take the impress of the whole beloved scene that in one brief minute would be gone from her, perhaps for ever.

They drove on ; the road descended rapidly ; the sea, the Solway, Skiddaw, Criffel, all were gone, and the low green border hills appeared, with Mount Agricola, the great mound that looks like an earth-work, raising its square shoulders above their soft curves.

“ And I must leave you all, just when I was beginning to know you a little ! ” said Alison, with tender regret. “ How much I might do ; I’ve done scarcely anything yet ; I cannot leave you, Birrendale ! There’s Mount Agricola ! How I should like to write about the Roman remains found there ! I feel to-day as if I could write about everything I see here, even about those women in the fields. I cannot leave you, Birrendale ! ” And so all the way along until it seemed like the refrain of some old ballad :

“ I cannot leave you, Birrendale ! ”

And those others, they, too, were learning a song that would haunt them always. They grew silent to listen to it. It made them strangely happy.

That song itself might not be written down by any human hand ; but the accompaniment went always :

“ Together, forever ; forever, together :  
Through Birrendale to Allarbie.”

Probably they both were thinking of a much longer road ; for Mac, when Jessie had asked him to let her drive, had answered vehemently, as he put the reins into her hands : “ Here—drive on to the world’s end, Jessie.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE LIGHT BEYOND THE FIRTH.

THE next day, the last in the old home, Mrs. Bayliss and the girls were tremendously busy; for although the house was now very nearly in order for the new comers, and the bulk of the luggage had been sent away, there were, as there always are, innumerable last details to look after. Ten minutes or so was all Jessie could find for Mac during that day.

But Mac lingered about, ignoring his usual hour of return, and was rewarded by being allowed to row the girls and Mrs. Bayliss over to the cemetery on the other side of the Birren, after having spent much time in gathering flowers for the grave of the late Captain.

He left them at the gates of the cemetery, and waited there for them. There was something in his being allowed even this small share in the family grief that touched and yet was gravely pleasant to him. It gave a sort of reality or rather real-lifelikeness to his engagement with Jessie; while it inspired him

with a reverential awe for the sacredness of affection.

When the sorrowful little group returned, meeting him with sad averted faces, he offered his arm to Mrs. Bayliss with almost filial respect. His own parents had died when he was very young ; they were shrouded in a tender mystery.

His ideal of parental and filial affection had consequently never been rudely brought into contact with any unpleasant actual experience.

Mrs. Bayliss had her veil down, but Mac could tell she had been weeping.

He thought that now would be a favourable moment to speak to her of Jessie.

They walked a little way in silence.

At last Mac said, very much under his usually robust voice :

“ You must have noticed that I am very fond of Jessie.”

“ You seem to like to talk to her,” said Mrs. Bayliss.

“ Her going away is dreadful to me,” said Mac, earnestly and simply. “ I never felt such a wrench before. It’s dreadful ! ”

“ Wrench,” was a fortunate word. It went straight to Mrs Bayliss’s heart and expressed too well her own feelings.

"It is dreadful!" she sighed.

"I may come and see you when I am in town?" Mac asked.

"Certainly."

"She says she likes me a little," said Mac. "You don't object, I hope? May I sometimes send her a note? She has promised to wait until—that is we are going to be very prudent you know."

"Then you have left off playing?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, as they came to the top of the river bank.

"Let me help you! Playing? I never played! May I write?" said Mac, earnestly.

"If you are quite sure," said Mrs. Bayliss, with an emphasis that coming at that time was not without its pathos.

"I'm never in doubt about these matters, I always know when I hate and when I love, and I know I love Jessie," said Mac, with downright honest fervour.

"It's a very awful thing to say," sighed Mrs. Bayliss.

"Yes, yes, but it's true;" returned Mac, as he handed the widow into the punt, where the swift-footed girls were awaiting them.

Mrs. Bayliss and Alison went up the brae together for the last time. Mac and Jessie lingered on the little stone bridge, beneath

which the burn was still singing its own last song before it lost its identity in the river.

“Oh, Mac !” cried Jessie, clinging to him. “Oh, Mac ! I’m going to be very good to you, indeed, indeed I am ! I’m going to think of you all day long and every day. Yes, I am ! I don’t want to go away ! Oh, why did you come back and make it so hard for me to go ?”

“Darling ! Darling ! I’ll come after you. We won’t say good-bye. I shan’t be able to stay away from you. You’d draw me to you wherever you were ! Jessie don’t cry so, love, I can’t bear it. I’ll come ; I’ll come almost directly. Oh, when I think what time I’ve wasted that I might have used in working for you, I could kill myself with rage ! but now I’m going to work like a giant, and all for you. It’s dreadful waiting here doing nothing ! But we’re all looking out, something will turn up. It’s sure to turn up ; but this waiting for work is awful now I’ve found you ; now I know how I shall glory in the worst drudgery for your sake, more than if I had caught all the salmon in all the streams in Scotland ! Oh, what a fool I used to be !”

“But all sorts of things may happen ?” sighed Jessie. “And I’m so nervous, I’ve had so much to make me nervous. I’m not strong

like you. But, oh Mac ! I'm going to be so good to you ! I am, indeed I am ! ”

And so they talked, and said farewell, with only the woods and the stream to see them. Jessie cried all that night long. The tears ran from under her eyelids and down her face, on to the pillow, and she had not power to stop them.

Then came the last day.

It was wet, cold, grey ; but when all was ready for their leaving, the girls ran off into the hill-side garden to try and pluck a few wet flowers to take away with them.

The poor Captain's hats and coats were gone from the hall ; when the girls returned, Mac was there waiting to help them in any way he could.

It was too sad to leave the place where so much had been hoped, and suffered, and lost ; and—might Mac and Jessie say won ?

Presently the mud-besplashed omnibus arrived.

After many delays, at last Mrs. Bayliss and the girls took their places in the ram-shackle vehicle, and Mac went with them.

The lean old horse after a desperate struggle got the omnibus to move ; the three women sitting within looked out of the door to see the last of their old home. The sky was grey

above it, the rain was drizzling around it, the firs and spruces looked black and sombre. That was the aspect under which they knew it best, yet how hard, how heart-rending it was to leave it all !

Mac, sitting next to Jessie, took her hand in his and pressed it ; but she never turned from the door as long as the firs of Cauld-knowe were in sight, although she clutched Mac's hand tightly.

They drove down the wet road to the wet station.

There, there were more farewells and bitter, bitter heartaches.

The heartless train came up and took them away. Mac stood at the extreme end of the platform and watched, with such a horrible pain as he had never felt before, Jessie's face grow dim and formless in the distance, as it turned to him from the window. Jessie watched Mac until the line turned and he was lost.

Then life seemed unbearable.

Ah ! that was a wrench, for her, for him, for all of them.

\*       \*       \*       \*

Alison was the first to recover herself.

Her eyes were presently clear enough to see the dead level Solway side.

Then there was a break in the dark rain-clouds. They parted, and rolling back towards Scotland, revealed the Cambrian Skiddaw range beyond the silvery Firth, under a dazzling sunlight that shone out brilliantly through the broadening rift.

“Look, mother, look! The sun is shining on England! It’s a happy omen! There’s brightness before us. Look up, dearest mother, look up,” Alison said, gently touching her mother’s arm.

“Your father’s grave, dear! Oh, your father’s grave!”

“Mother, he isn’t there. He’ll be as near us all in London,” Alison went on, with a little gentle authority. “See, dear, that light is so lovely! It’s spreading all over the English border! Here, we’ve left Gretna, we shall be in England directly, in our own country, in England once more!”

And Alison kept her gaze on the sweet pearly light that shone beyond the Firth, among the lordly English hills, until her own face brightened in sympathy. She needs must greet her native land with a smile.

But Jessie saw no light; she only knew that Mac was left behind.

## CHAPTER XV.

“ UNDOUBTEDLY THE FINEST SQUARE IN EUROPE.”—*John Harbuckle.*

THE Tower of London and its surroundings are so little known to the majority of English people, that I am sure I shall not only be forgiven, but thanked, if I try to make the kind people who may take the trouble to read this narrative understand exactly where they are.

I will assume then that you are all intimate with Charing Cross Station ; you have started from it many a time for your wanderings among those foreign cities you know so well.

You have also recrossed the river into Cannon Street ; and as your train has passed over the great bridge at the very spot where ancient Britons and Romans once crossed the Thames, you may have noticed, about a mile further down the river, the four turrets of the square White Tower, familiar to you in the wood-cuts of your school books.

It is more than probable that from Cannon

Street Railway Bridge, you have taken your only view of one of the greatest historical monuments of your native land.

Between Cannon Street and the Tower, is the busiest part of the City of London, to you, perhaps, an absolutely unexplored country ; although it may be, that, whether you are gentle or simple, some of your own ancestors had their homes in those City streets, worshipped in those City churches, mouldered to dust in those City tombs.

The Tower stands, as it were, at the unquiet limits of the world, as known to London Society. Beyond it are docks, and docks, and docks and wharves ; the mysterious regions of Ratcliff, Shadwell, Wapping, Limehouse, haunts of the land shark, the Lascar, and other such like wild fowl.

Further inland lie Whitechapel and the whole of the vast East End.

You may have heard of the East End before ; possibly from your friend who organizes charity, or from an art-student, eager to bring beauty to the homes of the poor, or from the patrician amateur musicians who entertain the people, or from one of that most noble band who started the ragged school movement, long before philanthropy became fashionable ("The Hearl! God bless him!"

as the costers say), or from the promoters of park parties, or from the coffee tavern people, the industrial home people, the temperance people, the sanitary people, the "open spaces" people, the evangelistic people, the ritualistic people, the nursing people, the domestic economy people ; for in the East End are the happy hunting grounds, the illimitable fields where the riders of innumerable excellent hobbies find their freest scope.

A few wicked people also roam those boundless prairies of the far East.

The great collection of buildings ancient and modern, grand and shabby, picturesque and prosaic, now known as THE TOWER, stands on the foot and side of a hill that slopes upwards from the north bank of the Thames.

Until within a comparatively recent date it was entirely surrounded by water ; on one side by the river, on the others by a deep wide moat ; into which people at one time were apt to fall and get drowned on dark or foggy nights.

The moat is dry now. Part of it is used as a drilling ground, part is divided off into miniature kitchen gardens ; this last is the side by St. Catherine Docks, which is but little seen by the public, and where much of the barrack washing is dried.

I may here mention that the drying of washing seems to present a great domestic difficulty to the present inmates of the fortress, as they have been driven to run up lines across the roofs of several of the Towers. One may, for instance, often see a string of pennants fluttering in the breeze above the grim, sentry-guarded archway by which the public enter the precincts, or on the top of the Brick Tower, the cold upper rooms of which were the last prison of Walter Raleigh.

Washing, however, is not obliged to be unpicturesque ; indeed it “composes” very well indeed, as has frequently of late years been shown by many a distinguished artist, whose works adorn even our most esoteric collections ; it has also its value as evidence that human beings, as well as historical associations, are living within THE TOWER OF LONDON.

The Tower Gardens, high up upon the wall that flanks the moat, whose form they follow, are, except at the angle facing the Minories, where they broaden into a lawn, merely a strip of grassy bank, running steeply down from the public path that leads over Tower Hill to the Docks. But this grassy bank is so cunningly set with trees that within the Gardens it is almost impossible to believe you are within a few feet of a crowded thorough-

fare. Seen from within those trees the city suggests not London, but Paris, until you turn to the grey weather-stained walls below you, and to the bastions above them, and feel that the four centred turrets they enclose can belong only to the Tower of London.

Beyond the Tower Gardens is a great Square, "incomparably the finest in Europe," as John Harbuckle said ; and he ought to be an authority, for he had lived there nearly all his life, and had moreover seen most of the capitals of the Continent.

The Trinity Brethren, that illustrious confraternity, who look after our island's coast and our beacons, have their house on the north side of the square—its white classical façade stands out boldly among the great plane-trees of the square gardens, when you look across from the opposite side.

The gardens of Trinity Square, where now the turf is always of the greenest, cover the spot long occupied by a scaffold, on which, in the days that were earlier, those noblemen and gentlemen whose rank entitled them to the honour, had their heads cut off.

If you really would see the square at its best you must stand some summer evening on the bit of broad pavement in

front of the Trinity House, and look down on the great pile of the Tower and the few masts in a little space of river beside it, all seen, lying in a warm haze, through green waving boughs, with a foreground of turf so cool, so exquisitely kept, right in front of you ; see Trinity Square, I repeat, on such an evening, or on a fine spring morning, and I think you will come nigh to allowing that John Harbuckle's verdict was correct.

It was in the north-west angle of this historic square that John Harbuckle himself lived.

For many years that house of his had worn a rather dingy exterior, but towards the end of a certain May fresh window blinds and lace curtains had made their appearance—as had also painted flower-boxes full of geraniums and other blossoms.

What an affair it had been to get the house into some sort of order for the widow and the girls ! What an upheaval of all John Harbuckle's feelings, thoughts, and property !

John Harbuckle's intimate friends and acquaintances began to observe a change in that worthy man immediately after his return from Scotland. He lost the placidity that used to be one of his chief characteristics, he grew

nervous, at times irritable, left his gloves and umbrella behind him in shops and in other people's houses, forgot more than once to sign his name to his cheques, bought a new coat in which he was extremely uncomfortable, neglected to read articles that all his friends were discussing, and in short showed signs of being under a new and very disturbing influence.

Towards the end of May this change became more evident ; but by that time every one knew that his sister and his nieces were coming to live with him.

Catherine Court saw him rarely, so did the Tower Gardens. As soon as business was over all his time, until far into the night, was now devoted to getting the house into order for his women-folk.

Now this to some men would have been a comparatively easy task, but to John Harbuckle it was an exceedingly difficult and complicated one.

He was not the man to say to Robbins : "Clear out the big room at the top of the house for a den for me ; take all my books and papers and other things up to it ; arrange the dining-room and drawing-room properly ; tell your wife to see that all is ready for the ladies. Put on as much extra help as you want, don't worry me about it until it's

finished. I'll get lodgings out of town while it's being done

This was not at all the way in which John Harbuckle went to work.

John Harbuckle happening to find some well-painted tiles among the furniture with which the drawing-room was crowded, began operations by having them made into window-boxes, the designing and filling of which cost him much anxious thought.

"The girls will be sure to want those oak chests to put their things into," he said next, "so I must have them finished off at once; then of course Mary must have one as well as the girls, so I must look it up. Let me see, in whose catalogue did I notice one? Smith and Jones's? Brown and Robinson's? Ha! I remember, Grey and Green's! so it was! I'll go and have a look at Grey and Green's things. The rooms will all require fresh carpets and curtains, but Mary had better choose them herself; I should be sure to do wrong there. I really must get rid of some of these things. Let me see, there's that French side-board for instance—good example of the style of the first empire. I suppose"—a reluctant sigh—"I suppose that must go. Well, I'll have it done up for the young Thorntons, they'll be glad to have it; but"—with another sigh—"a

really fine example! a fine example! I'd better go and write to Thornton at once, perhaps there's something else he'd fancy ; I'll ask him to call." So the letter was written and the answer waited for, and the young husband came, and then he must needs, being but newly wedded, leave matters unsettled until his wife could see the side-board, and then when the wife came, and liked it, she wore a mantle with a fringe that caught in everything, and pulled down a small terra-cotta bust upon one of John Harbuckle's most cherished Wedgewood placques with the Flaxman figures, and shivered Cupid and Pysche, who were whispering together, to atoms.

"I do hope and trust," said John Harbuckle to himself, "that Mary and the girls won't wear fringes."

Young Mrs. Thornton was so distressed at the accident that John Harbuckle was obliged to give the most charming little cup and saucer to console her.

At this rate it naturally took a good while to make the house habitable.

There was very good "picking" left for Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, who furnished comfortable little rooms for themselves out of the material that John Harbuckle gave them, or to which they helped themselves.

As for John Harbuckle's feelings on the eventful day when his visitors were to arrive, they are not to be described. Early in the morning he went down to Billingsgate and then to Leadenhall Market, buying fish, flesh, fowl and fruit, with the greatest care. He had horrible fears that by some means or another Mary and the girls would arrive at some impossible hour long before the dinner was cooked ; he could not bring himself to believe that three women could travel from Scotland without something abnormal happening, and when he went off to meet them he had but a faint expectation of finding that they had come by the train specified.

Poor John Harbuckle ! The train was a few minutes late ; those few minutes were very bad ones to him, as he waited on the platform at Euston, not daring to move from the spot on which he stood, for fear the cab-man he had already engaged should play him false at the critical moment, if he did not keep a sharp eye upon him.

As he stood beside the cab, nervously watching for the Scotch train, a local train came in with a good many passengers.

They passed close by him.

He was growing more and more nervous every minute.

Turning his head he caught sight of one of the passengers, a tall, well-made man, leisurely walking away from him.

John Harbuckle rubbed his eyes—the tall man was gone.

“I must be going mad ! This is getting too much for my brain ! No ! no ! I’m no seer of ghosts ! A quarter of an hour late ! What can have happened ? But that man ! I never saw such a likeness ! Ah ! here’s the train !”

But he never expected to see them all safe and sound.

His surprise was only equaled by his thankfulness when he found them all three unhurt, with the number of their packages complete and not so much as a railway ticket lost.

I am afraid he was, in consequence, over lavish to the guard, feeling that had that functionary not done his duty in an exceptionally able and intelligent manner, those three lady passengers would certainly not have arrived in so fine a state of preservation.

They drove safely down to Tower Hill, and the delightful sense of being in a great capital sent the spirits of the girls up rapidly ; but nothing could cheer Mrs. Bayliss.

It was nearly dark when they reached their new home. The entrance seemed cold and

business-like, the broad uncarpeted stairs of the first flight hardly suggested a private dwelling.

But John Harbuckle held back the swing door above that first flight, and showed other stairs, softened with carpets, and a wide landing, where were oriental rugs, and a long window, with festoons of fruit and flowers carved above it, and broad-leaved aspodistræ, and delicate ferns in great blue pots in the window seat, and leading from this pleasant passage, a large, well-lighted dining-room, where the table was covered with shining white napery, bright old-fashioned silver, and where the heavy dinner-waggon bore appliances of more substantial meal than the books and papers it had held not long ago.

It was the same room in which John Harbuckle had been sitting when we first had the pleasure of looking in upon him, only now—to use Janet's expression when she went to put on her afternoon dress—now it had been “sorted.”

“ My dear Mary, I am truly glad you are all with me at last ! ” said John Harbuckle, “ very truly glad ! ”

“ Thank you,” said Mary, coldly. “ You have made the place look better than I expected to find it.”

“It’s quite lovely!” said Alison, gazing round with pleasure. “And you haven’t taken all the books away! That is good of you!”

“Well, well,” said her uncle, nervously, “go and get your bonnets off. Make haste, don’t keep Mrs. Robbins waiting, I’m afraid we’re late already.”

So putting themselves under the guidance of a niece of Mrs. Robbins’s, who had come in to help, they went upstairs, to a couple of large rooms, of wonderful and spotless cleanliness, each containing a venerable “four poster,” and after a hasty toilet came down again.

Mrs. Robbins had indeed done her best; she heaped coals of fire without stint on John Harbuckle’s ungrateful head. Down to its smallest detail that meal was delicious. It propitiated even Mrs. Bayliss.

“For I must admit,” she said, “that there is no comparison between the eatables in London and what you can get elsewhere; and after all, it is very pleasant to have dinners in which everything is nice.”

“Ah it is!” sighed John Harbuckle, and if his conscience reproved him on the score of Mrs. Robbins, a foreboding that he felt was but too well founded, told him that the dinners he would have at his own table in which every-

thing would be very nice were destined henceforth to be few and very far between.

You won't think the worse of my two girls if I tell you that they most thoroughly enjoyed that dinner, and declared that everything had a much better flavour in London than anywhere else ; in which verdict, I think, most people will concur ?

"Even birds of Paradise peck a little now and then ;" and my girls were but mortals who felt that three hundred miles was a long distance to come in one day.

John Harbuckle slept but indifferently that night, so anxious was he about his guests, but whenever he dropped off he was haunted by a tall man, who smoked a cigar, the thing of all others John Harbuckle detested. When he awoke he had a horrible dread come over him that someone was going to steal Jessie from him ; not his Jessie of Catherine Court, but that hazel-eyed girl whose voice was so like the voice he had heard from the man in the cab ; it was not Mac Carruthers he feared.



# THE TOWER GARDENS.

A Novel.

BY

LIZZIE ALDRIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "BY LOVE AND LAW;" "THE WORLD SHE AWOKE IN;"  
"THE OLD ABBOT'S ROAD," &c.

"Now was there made, fast by the Touris wall,  
A garden fair."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE  
TOWER GARDENS.

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CHAPTER I.

A DAY IN THE CITY SQUARE.

VERY early next morning Alison awoke with a start. What had happened? Was the house shaken by an earthquake? Were all the chimneys tumbling about her? Were they still at Cauldknowe, within sound of the Birren rushing down to the Solway, or indeed in London?

Alison opened her eyes and, collecting her thoughts, knew where she was, but not what had awakened her.

Jessie slept on, unconscious of any noise. Alison listened, all was quiet again. Then there came a rush and a whirl and a clatter and then more clatter; then quiet, and the

chirping of many sparrows ; Alison rose, went to the window and cautiously lifted a corner of the blind.

The noise was soon accounted for ; it was caused by a couple of fish carts flying over the stony road-way, down Tower Hill to Billings-gate, the fish market, you know. They went at a tremendous rate, those fish carts, and so did the “costers” hand-barrows that followed ; light were the flying wheels that rattled down the Hill, and active were their owners.

Not much traffic, however, passed the sleepy corner where was Alison’s new home, although the lower part of Tower Hill below it was crowded, and the streets leading down to the market all but blocked up.

The opposite windows were far away beyond the gardens of the Square ; their blinds were all close drawn ; the very houses seemed asleep. Alison was very sleepy, too, but nevertheless was impelled to linger at her window, by her wish to see that view of which she had heard all her life.

The morning was fresh and dewy ; it was early summer on Tower Hill, although only yesterday in Scotland—yesterday, how long ago !—it had been spring, and the apple-trees had been in bloom.

“The Tower ! That’s the Tower !” Alison felt with delight, as her eyes recognised the four turrets.

“How lovely ! Ah, how lovely ! Earth can’t have anything to show more fair !” From her window so high up above all she saw, she looked away, across the fore-ground of dew-laden trees and grass, down on to the grey mass of wall, bastions, towers, dwellings, belfries and masts, all bathed in the pure light of early morning. “It can’t be real ! It’s too beautiful ! It’s fairy land !” Alison felt rather than thought, as she gazed down upon it with loving wonder.

“The Tower ! That’s the Tower ! That is actually the Tower, where they all lived and suffered ! Lady Jane Grey, blindfolded, stretching out her poor little hands to feel for the block, and asking, “Where is it ? Where is it ?” It happened just over there, beyond those quiet boughs, within those grey walls. The poor young princes, Elizabeth, Ann Askew, More, Fisher, Raleigh—only just beyond those trees, within those walls ! It doesn’t seem possible ; I can’t believe it.”

She could not think of anything distinctly ; it seemed to her as if all the history of England were before her, in a concrete form.

“Alie, what’s happening ? What are you

doing there?" presently asked a very sleepy voice.

"Looking at the Tower! Oh, Jessie, it's so lovely! It's wonderful! Do come and see it!"

"So sleepy!" murmured Jessie.

"The idea of your being sleepy when there's the Tower to be seen!" retorted Alison.

"You dreadful, dreadful, en-er-get-ic person—I'm dead asleep!" yawned Jessie. Nevertheless, a few minutes later she, too, was standing at the window.

"This looks as if it were going to be a nice place to live in" said Jessie. "There's evidently something to be seen. Oh, Alie! do look at that man driving that queer cart! He's the merry 'coster' I'm sure, I've read about him. I recognize him at once. I love the rate he drives at. Oh do 'hi' him. 'Hi' him, will you Alie, and make him take us for a drive? I could so like spinning all over London at that rate, before anyone's up! Won't you 'hi' the gentleman? Hi! make haste, he'll be out of ear-shot directly, and I'm nearly asleep again. What, you won't? then your life shall be a burden to you, when I wake up."

"You were more able for it than I," said

Alison, Scotch-ly, laughing at the curious contrast between Jessie's drowsy voice and her brisk words.

"I shall regret that drive all my days; I do like the way in which he whizzes along. Oh, that's your Tower, is it? Good morning, Tower," and she nodded as if to an old and intimate friend. "Glad to see you, Tower!"

"Where's your bump of reverence?" asked Alison, who was still half spell-bound with what she saw.

"Fa-a-sh ashleep!" murmured Jessie, laying her pretty head on Alison's shoulders.

It was nearly eight o'clock before the girls resumed their conversation, and then what they said is hardly worth recording, except to tell you that they both remarked that it was nice to have a cup of tea brought to one before starting on the arduous work of the toilet, and that it was still more pleasant not to have to think about breakfast until it was ready;

"Although," remarked Jessie, "we enjoyed ourselves in a way, coffeeing and sconeing in that old kitchen in Birrendale, didn't we?"

Jessie was the first down that morning.

The dining-room she entered looked very different from John Harbuckle's den.

John Harbuckle had now another den, quite at the top of the house.

The dining-room was no longer over-crowded, the table was properly arranged with blue china for four.

It was very pleasant that morning. The sun shone in through the open window across the painted tiled flower-boxes, full of blooming pelargoniums, and a brisk breeze was tossing the boughs of the neighbouring plane-trees, and making a fresh music that could be heard above the heavy ground-swell of the traffic from the bonded warehouses.

“This is charming!” said Jessie, as she entered. “This is life! I do like life so much! One feels there are people about! A great many people! Ah!—What a letter for me already? That is good of Mac!” she cried with delight.

She took it up, there was no one to see her, she clasped it to her, “As if it had been a tender little babe.” She did not open it at once, silly child; she kissed it, and turned it about, and really, it was almost a pity there was no one to see her, she looked so pretty as at last she read it.

It was not very long, just a few words to catch the post to let her know he was going to write a small volume that evening; and

that the whole of Birrendale had been to him, since Jessie had gone, enveloped in the densest darkness, and that he and Alec were going to leave no stone unturned, so that in a short time she might expect to hear very good news. At present, he was only conscious that she had been gone a very long while, and that everything was dark without her. The darkness seemed to stupify him, although he heard Alec say it was fine and the sun was shining.

This little note made Jessie very happy. Could Mac have seen her he would have thought and probably said that the radiance of her face was enough to make darkness flee away for ever. Poor Mac ! He was feeling very lonely just then, at Muirhead.

Jessie, as she went over the lines again, retreated to the mantel-piece, on which she leaned her right elbow, while she held the note in her left hand.

“ Dear Mac ! ” she said, looking tenderly at the note, “ I am going to be very good to you ; I am indeed ! ”

Then hearing footsteps she quickly folded the note and half covered it with the hand that rested on the mantel-piece.

The door was opened, John Harbuckle came in. For one moment Jessie kept her

position, and the old bachelor saw this lovely vision, his lost Jessie's daughter, standing with her wrist and hand crossing a well-defined, and too well-remembered vein in the marble —the precise spot where he had found, one morning, the fatal letter that had parted him from Jessie's mother for ever.

He had been twenty-nine then, he was fifty-three now.

And Jessie Bayliss came to greet him with so sweet a grace! He was very deeply moved and so was she, but from quite another cause ; she knew nothing of that vision he had seen, she was thinking of Mac Carruthers.

“I hope you are none the worse for your journey,” John Harbuckle said, gravely.

“Oh, no!” said she, “I slept and slept until Alie thought I would never wake up.”

“And have you seen your aunt yet?” enquired John Harbuckle, a little uneasily.

“No ; but Alison’s been helping her. They’ll be down directly. And, oh, uncle John ! what a charming place to live in ! How full of life it is. I do like people so much ! I shall be so fond of London soon !”

“I hope you will be, Jessie ; I hope you will be,” said John Harbuckle ; and as he turned to his own correspondence he was aware that Jessie had slipped into the sacred arm-chair,

in which his mother had died. He was not hurt by seeing her lithe young form where so long he had watched with infinite tenderness but sad pain, that old and shrunken figure ; it was a comfort to him to see Jessie there.

Alison was the next to arrive.

“ Slept well, my dear ? ” asked uncle John, glancing up from his little pile of papers.

“ I was a long while going to sleep, and I woke early to look at the Tower. It was so lovely in the early morning ! ”

Uncle John rose with his customary deliberation, went to the book-case, took down a volume of “ Knight’s London,” put it into Alison’s hands, and resumed the reading his letters.

Alison went to the window-seat, looked for a moment or two at the book, then closed it over her fingers and gazed out of the window as if mesmerised.

Uncle John, turning slightly to look at her, saw she was quite lost. Her eyes were unusually bright, but her gaze was with her thoughts and they were beyond Tower Gardens.

Utterly absorbed in what she gazed at, and wholly unconscious of herself, she nevertheless made a very pleasant picture to uncle John, a

picture that brought no sad memories with it, as she sat there with her grey dress touching the bright flowers in the boxes, and her neat brown head against a back-ground of waving boughs, her hand between the pages of the large and much used book.

“She has evidently the ‘right feeling!’” said uncle John to himself, “she and I will be great friends.”

Now Mrs. Bayliss had occupied the room immediately under the girls. Mrs. Bayliss awoke in very bad spirits. It is always exceedingly trying for the daughter of a house to return to her old home except in prosperous circumstances, and Mary Bayliss was only too conscious that she had come back as a failure. She had made her venture upon the sea of independent life, and shipwreck had been the result.

When she opened her eyes in the morning and recognized the carving on the venerable four-post bedstead which had been one of the first objects that had attracted her gaze as an infant, she turned on her pillow and wept bitterly, not only for her husband and her own lost home, but for herself; it galled her so terribly to come back again to the old house in Trinity Square.

She rose and made a careful toilet forgetting

nothing that could help her to maintain her dignity. Her crape was new and uncrumpled, her hem-stitched bands without a crease, her cap set firmly over her smooth faded hair, its broad white strings floated gracefully behind her, her jet broach and heavy jet chain, and in fact all the insignia of her widowhood were fresh and imposing.

Presently she drew up the blind, faced the well-remembered view with severe eyes, and hated it. She had never, since quite early years, liked it ; she had been eager to leave it with her James Bayliss ; her visits to it had been very rare ; she had seldom come there except when she could not well help it, as, for instance, a few weeks before Alison was born, when her husband had been ordered to India and she could not go with him.

“ No,” she said, looking across the square to the Tower, “ no, I never liked the place and I never can like it. I simply detest it. Ah ! how well I remember my feeling of delight when I took my last look of it on my wedding day ! Just as the carriage was turning that corner down below into Tower Street, I looked up at the old place and thought how thankful I was to be leaving it and the hateful City for ever ! It’s too hard to have to come back to it !—too hard ! My girls—his girls !

if it had not been for you, no earthly power should have brought me back ! I trust to make John move somewhere else ; but he's such a thorough citizen ! I know I shall have a difficulty with him."

And with such like reflections Mary Bayliss went down to breakfast in a distinctly dismal frame of mind, to find the other members of the little household awaiting her arrival.

At the entrance of Mrs. Bayliss the *rêveuse* started, and left the window. She had already seen her mother that morning.

John Harbuckle rose, shook his sister's hand, and moved the chair at the head of the table for her.

"I hope you've had a good night, Mary," he began.

"Pretty good," said Mary, taking the chair. "My head aches this morning."

She looked round the room for an instant, but without anything like interest, until at last she caught sight of a photograph of herself hanging over the mantel-piece.

"My dear John, you really shouldn't," she began, reproachfully.

"It's always been there. I didn't like to remove it," said John.

"Then please do it at once," said Mary.

“ I’ll take it upstairs to my study presently,” said John.

“ No, destroy it, please ; I really can’t feel comfortable, with such an atrocity in the house.”

“ Well, my dear, just as you like ; but it’s an old friend, and I’m attached to it. I admit the dress of the period was not admirable, still, you know, it *was* the dress of the period, and I suppose, as such, has a certain value.”

Of course by this time both the girls were looking at the portrait. It had been taken a few days before Mary’s wedding, when the crinoline skirt and scoop bonnet were raging with their fiercest virulence.

Photographs of twenty-three years ago, are, one may say, invariably hideous in the eyes of to-day. Mary Bayliss was singularly unfortunate with her portraits ; and yet she had always been given to understand, that at the time she was married, she was not very far from being a pretty woman.

She turned that portrait to the wall, before she began to serve the breakfast.

John Harbuckle felt more than a little frightened of Mary ; but, after a brief silence, he ventured to ask, as he passed her a poached egg, “ Did you happen to notice the oak chest in your room ? ”

"I did notice something of the sort," said Mary ("Have I given you enough sugar, John?"); yes, I saw it, but I haven't examined it yet. You remember dear James brought me a fine camphire wood chest from India? I have it with me; but you can use any number of things of that sort."

"A remarkably fine example of Jacobean work," John put in, quietly. "Those in the girls' rooms are Florentine."

"And are those two lovely chests for us, uncle John?" asked Jessie.

"If you will accept them," said uncle John. "I couldn't get them quite alike, but they are as near alike as I could manage it."

"Alison, you have a chance of being tidy now," said Jessie.

"I'm sure I'll try my hardest," said Alison; "the pleasure of opening that old lid, will induce me to put my things away."

"I'm sure Alison isn't untidy," said uncle John, with a benevolent smile; "she looks the picture of neatness."

"Ah! I fear I add hypocrisy then to my other crimes," said Alison, with a mock sigh.

"If she only were half as tidy as she looks, indeed she would be grand!" said Jessie, merrily. "But what can you expect of a literary woman, uncle John?"

"I shall expect a great deal," said uncle John. "First of all, I shall expect to find her a delightful companion, and in that I am sure I shall not be disappointed."

"Now I'm going to be jealous," cried Jessie, pretending to pout.

"There are varieties of excellence," said John Harbuckle, looking across at Jessie, adding, with a very decided smile, "especially among girls;" then remembering that he had not included all the company, he further extended his remark by—"and women."

"Thank you, uncle John!" said the girls, in so pleasant a duet, that even Mary Bayliss smiled.

So the breakfast table was far from dull.

"I'll show you the drawing-room," said uncle John, when they had finished the meal. "I've scarcely done anything to it, because I thought it would be better for you to choose the curtains and carpets; I think you'll like my furniture; every piece is the best example of the style I could get; but if you should like something more modern, I can—well, for the present, I can take it up-stairs."

"Jessie, you'll have to look after the plants," he went on, as they left the dining-room, and paused for a moment before the palms and ferns in the passage. "Now, Mary, you

mustn't look at the room as it is now, you must consider its potentialities."

"Please what does that mean?" asks Jessie.

"It means you are to think how nice you can make it," said he, opening the door.

The room said distinctly that no woman above the rank of Mrs. Robbins had had anything to do with it for many years.

In spite of much recent turning out and cleaning there was still an odour of turpentine about it. "The carpet and curtains are the old originals," said Mary. "I can just make out the patterns, although they're faded past recognition. This is nice," and she took up a small Wedgwood tray of a ground of the faintest *chocolat-au-lait*, with a dainty little white lace-like pattern running round the border.

"I thought it would do for your four-o'clock tea," said John.

"Oh, but we shall never have any visitors here!" said Mary. "Who'll come to see us here?"

"Well, then, it will do for yourselves. The girls must always have pretty things every day. Ten o'clock: I must be going down to business now. You'd like to see Mrs. Robbins, I suppose."

“Yes, I think I’d better.”

“Very well,” and he rang the bell.

Mrs. Robbins’s niece appeared in a minute.

“Will you tell Mrs. Robbins that Mrs. Bayliss wishes to inspect her department? Very well, then, Mary, I’ll say good-bye until lunch, and I’ll leave you in the hands of Mrs. Robbins.”

“Very well, John. Here let me put your necktie straight, it’s all askew.”

“Thanks; and Mary,” said John, lowering his voice, “I think you must admit that Mrs. Robbins’s talent is undoubted.”

“The dinner was very well served yesterday,” said Mary, rather shortly.

“Perhaps it would be as well to take a little time to consider——” he suggested.

“I’ll keep my eyes open and my mouth closed,” said Mary, with a vigorous application of the clothes-brush to the collar of her brother’s coat. “You’ll have to get a new coat, John, this is simply disgraceful !”

“Anything you like to suggest, my dear,” acquiesced John.

Mary sighed, which had in it a double regret, first for her own lamented James, the superior cut of whose clothes she now recalled, and also for her brother’s well-remembered short-comings in that matter.

"For which reason," she said to herself, "I was never so hard on Jessie's mother for throwing John over in favour of poor Arthur, as perhaps, I ought to have been. James and Arthur always knew how to dress. Of course, dear James, being a soldier, it was only to be expected of him, but Arthur was certainly the best dressed civilian I ever met."

John Harbuckle disappeared behind the baize doors. The two girls ran upstairs to begin their unpacking, and Mrs. Bayliss went to inspect Mrs. Robbins's department, the offices of which were situated behind the dining-room.

The department seemed, to the outward eye, in excellent working order; Mrs. Robbins's manner was dignified, certainly, but withal friendly, and even loquacious; she received Mrs. Bayliss and her remarks with the most suave good humour. Luncheon and dinner were arranged satisfactorily, after a brief and amicable consultation, and Mrs. Bayliss was leaving, when, as if inspired by a sudden thought, she said,

"Oh, by-the-bye, Mrs. Robbins, I should like to see the tradesmen's books. I'll pay them every week in future."

"Oh, certainly, mem," said Mrs. Robbins. "Annie," to her niece, "bring Mrs. Bayliss the books."

Annie obeyed, and put into Mrs. Bayliss's hand a neat pile of new books, rosy and just as they had come from the stationer's, with their gilt lettering fresh and untarnished.

"Oh—we are to start afresh! Well, that's a very good arrangement. The old books were all paid up, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, mem. Perhaps you'd like to see them?" asked Mrs Robbins, with the smile of conscious innocence.

"Well, yes, I should," said Mary.

"Where are they, Annie?" asked Mrs. Robbins, ingenuously. "Let me see, didn't Mr 'Arbuckle ask for them to be brought up to him? Yes, now I come to remember, he did! You took them up, didn't you, Annie? Yes, she did, mem, I recollect it now. They'll be in master's study. Annie, you run up and fetch them for Mrs. Bayliss."

"Well," said Annie, who had opened one of the dresser drawers and was fumbling about in it, "I did take them up, but I think Mr. Harbuckle must have burned them, or tore them up—for this was all that was left of them, when I went to clean up yesterday morning." And from out of the drawer (which, by-the-bye, was not up to the rest of the department in neatness or cleanliness) she produced several dingy red covers.

"Oh, well, never mind, it doesn't at all matter. You'll let me have the new ones every Tuesday morning." And Mrs. Bayliss retreated to her own room.

"So John's burned his books, has he? That tells its own tale. Mrs. Robbins will have to go," she said, as she went upstairs. She had not, however, been many minutes alone before there was a gentle tap at her door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Bayliss, wearily.

"Oh, if you please, mem," said Mrs. Robbins, "I thought I'd better tell you at once, that R. and me's thinking of going into business."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, mem, in the second-hand furniture and French-polishing line."

"Ah! He's picked up some little knowledge since he's been here, I daresay. When would you like to leave, Mrs. Robbins?"

"Well, mem, we don't want you to put yourself out of the way, of course, but supposing we say this day month?"

"Very well. If you can let Annie come up to help me unpack, I shall be obliged. Will it be all the same to you if we say this day fortnight?" she asked after a short pause.

"I should much prefer it, mem," said Mrs. Robbins, haughtily straightening her neck.

"Then so let it be," said Mrs. Bayliss, with severity.

"I told you so, R.," observed Mrs. R. to her lord shortly afterwards. "I wouldn't live with that woman, no, not for all the soverings that ever was made over there in the Mint! She's mean, R., mean! and if there's one creature on the face of the earth that asperates me, it's a mean woman! and she without a penny too! Ah! set a beggar on 'orse bag and we know where he—and more partickler where *she'll* drive to!"

"There, there, I never thought you two'd 'it it! Never mind, old gal, we know of a nice little place up Holborn way, don't we?" was the consoling reply of the loving R.

"When I think of what that pore old man 'ave brought on hisself!" said Mrs. R., holding up both her hands. "Well, there's one thing, R., them that don't know when they're well off, deserves what they get. He'll think of us, I guess, when the serpint's tooth comes 'ome to him, as come 'ome it will, and we'll live to see it, mark my words! Lor', R., wasn't she took aback when I hupped and give her notice! Cool as a coocumber, if you please, but, *took aback!* that wasn't the move

she'd expected. Bless yer! she'd made up her mind to give *me* notice; *me!* who's never had notice give me in all my born days!"

But, if Mrs. Robbins flattered herself that Mrs. Bayliss was annoyed, she flattered herself in vain; for Mrs. Bayliss merely said to herself, as Mrs. Robbins closed the door:

"Well, that matter has arranged itself without me! and under the circumstances, nothing could have been better!"

And dismissing the affair, after a very little more thought, she plunged into her unpacking.

John Harbuckle sighed when he heard of the news, for if there was one thing to which he took kindly, it was his dinner.

It was not until the cool of the evening that any of the little party went out; for Mary was tired in the afternoon and her head ached terribly, by that time she did not care to take the girls out, and as John was too busy and they could on no account be allowed to go without some one to take care of them, they stayed in, arranging their things and reading.

"Are we never to be allowed to go out without you or uncle?" asked Jessie, as she brought a cup of tea to Mary during the afternoon. "I'm beginning to feel like a

prisoner in the Tower. And Alison wants dreadfully to prowl and explore."

"This isn't at all the place where girls can go prowling about by themselves," said Mrs. Bayliss. "You can't walk East, because that's horribly disreputable ; North leads to the Jews' quarter, you can't go there ; West is the City, where you can't possibly be seen ; and you can't go South, unless you want to walk into the Thames."

"Oh ! then we're quite cooped up !" sighed Jessie, "I don't like being cooped up."

"Remember Jessie, I was a girl here myself once ; so I ought to know what is right and proper here."

"Oh, but that was years and years ago !" put in the thoughtless Jessie. "People know how to behave now. I'm dying to go out. I'm not used to being shut up and kept in."

"Well, at any rate you can't go out to-day, until uncle John can take care of you," said Mrs. Bayliss, in so tart a tone that Jessie withdrew at once, and she and Alison had to content themselves with what they could see from the windows. I'm afraid Jessie regretted the brae-side and the banks of the Birren water ; but as for Alison, the view of the Tower, and Charles Knight's delightful book opened a most wonderful and charming new world to her.

"Can you come out with us, Mary?" asked John, as he finished his after-dinner coffee.

"Not this evening; my head is too bad."

"Then suppose I take the girls into the Tower Gardens? I hope it doesn't take them long to dress."

"No, indeed!" And away they both flew.

And in a very few minutes John Harbuckle and the two girls went past the baize door, and down the uncarpeted stairs beyond, through the deserted entrance hall, that during the day was always so full of life, opened the heavy double door and heard it slam behind them.

Tower Hill was looking as if it had been hard at work all day. The pavement was dusty and littered by bits of paper and straw. One or two heavy vans were still in front of the houses; but traffic had nearly ceased and most persons had gone home. A few street boys ran about playing and shouting; a few groups of labourers lounged against the railings or at any vacant corners, having apparently nowhere else to go.

John Harbuckle and the girls crossed over to the Tower Gardens and entered them through the same gate by which the old bachelor had passed on that evening in the spring, which he was destined so long to remember.

Beyond the gate they were under the shadow of many trees, and separated from the dusty pavement by a high bank of sloping turf; they felt at once far in the country. They all strolled along the gravel path above the deep moat, pausing every other minute to look at the Tower and to discuss its historical associations.

They walked the whole length of the garden from the gate near the public entrance of the Tower to the little wilderness in which the walk terminates, hard by Iron Gate Wharf, on the other side of the buildings ; and then they returned.

The evening was very lovely, one of those sweet sober twilights in which everything looks beautiful. By the time they returned the lights were already twinkling here and there in the barrack windows and glowing through the deep embrasures of the bastions, like furnaces.

The girls and John Harbuckle sat down on a wooden bench near the gate by which they had entered, under the acacia trees, with their feet on the stone coping, and the moat sheer beneath them.

The evening was so still that they could hear the swish—swish of the river steamers that passed the Tower Wharf.

“I always think this is the most beautiful view of the Tower,” said John Harbuckie; “especially on a evening like this. Even the very cowls of the chimneys look lovely against that soft grey sky. All the colours and lines seem to run into one very exquisitely. That’s the old Beauchamp Tower nearly opposite—that was the State prison. Those roofs and tall chimneys belong to the dwellings within the precincts.”

So they all sat quietly talking and looking until it grew nearly dark. And then they paused ; until the silence grew oppressive to Jessie.

“Oh,” said she, with a shudder, “let us go in. I’m getting eerie ! Is it true, that the shadow of the axe is sometimes seen on those Tower walls ? ”

“Subjectively,” said John Harbuckle, with a grave smile, “the shadow of the axe is always seen there.”

“Oh, then, do take me home ! ” cried Jessie, turning away, and clinging to Alison’s arm. “I should die with fright if I saw it.”

“But, objectively, no one ever saw it,” continued uncle John, his smile broadening. “I have walked about these gardens ever since they have been laid out and I have never yet seen either the axe or its shadow ;

although I've many a time watched the Tower at the 'witching hour of night. Come, girls, we'll go home. Are you superstitious, Jessie?"

"Frightfully," said Jessie. "Our brae-side by Cauldknowe was haunted, you know."

"Jessie! how can you talk such rubbish," said Alison, who wanted to stay out longer. "Uncle John, did you ever see a ghost?"

"I'm not quite sure," said uncle John, slowly and with a hesitation. To himself he added:

"That voice; I could have sworn to it! and Jessie's is so like it. Whenever Jessie speaks I hear that voice again. And that man at the station? The outcome of my own morbid dreams, that's all. No, Jessie," he said aloud with decision, "I never saw a ghost, I never expect to see one, and if this place isn't haunted I should say none was."

"Yes—still, you know, still, very curious things have happened!"

"Merely coincidences! Jessie," he said, "merely coincidences!"

"Well, don't let any coincidences happen to me! I should die, if I saw a ghost, even if it were only a coincidence," said Jessie. "I should just fall down dead, I am sure I should."

## CHAPTER II.

### TRINITY MONDAY.

FEW girls have ever enjoyed their first visit to London more thoroughly than did Alison and Jessie.

During their first fortnight in their new home the weather was perfect; and what can one want better than a fine June day in London? The great town seemed to them, compared to the Scotch burghs and villages among which their five last years had been spent, a vast universe; and everything was so large, so grand, so beautiful, so forward, so very much the best that could be had, that it was altogether delightful.

Everything, in its fresh novelty, was altogether delightful, especially, to Jessie, the inexhaustible quantity of dress and bonnet shops; especially, to Alison, the City itself.

Of course there were many new things to be bought. The dresses that had not been too warm for spring in Scotland were too warm for summer in London, so all sorts of light

fabrics had to be made up ; in the choosing and making of which Jessie took an enormous interest. And so, in spite of her grief, did Mrs. Bayliss, for there is certainly something peculiarly soothing to most feminine minds in new and pretty clothes. On this subject Jessie and Mrs. Bayliss sympathized deeply. They spent, it is true, comparatively little, but they saw a great deal for their money, always studying very many shop windows before buying anything ; so, at a trifling cost, Jessie by dint of remembering what she saw, could indulge herself in imaginary raiment to any extent, and of unparalleled beauty. Jessie always knew exactly how she would look in anything, and took an infinite delight in mentally arraying herself in the most charming and costly toilettes, while in reality she was perfectly satisfied with a sixpenny print, provided she was allowed a modest quantity of cream-coloured lace at three-pence three-farthings a yard, wherewith to adorn her pretty wrists and throat. There was only one drawback to Jessie's enjoyment—there was no Mac to see how nice she looked, that sometimes made her rather sad ; only there was always such long letters every day and that kept her happy.

In all these things Alison might also for a

time have taken very deep interest, had not both Mrs. Bayliss and Jessie resolved that she must have a hat in which she really would look her best; for these kind people always felt that Alison never did justice to herself and never looked her best. This was a very terrible resolve as far as Alison was concerned; acting upon it, they ruthlessly dragged her from shop to shop, they made her try on hats by the dozen—she was very difficult both to please and suit—and at last bought her something in which she looked, they declared, quite another being; of the truth of which assertion she felt only too certain every time she put it on, she did not know herself in it the least. This experience gave her more than a distaste for shopping with the others.

After a few days the two girls were allowed to go out by themselves, but only along duly specified routes; these routes being to St. Paul's Churchyard and back with the choice of Cheapside or Cannon Street.

“And upon no account go up Mincing Lane or Mark Lane, or any of the business lanes,” said Mrs. Bayliss one day, as they passed the first-mentioned turning on their way to Cannon Street Station. Mrs. Bayliss always took them to the West End when she went out with them herself.

“Why?” asked Jessie, who alone of all the household was rarely afraid of her aunt. “It looks just a common-place street, only the cabs and waggons will accumulate at its corners and make it difficult to cross.”

“But it’s quite a business place,” said Mrs. Bayliss. “No woman ought to be seen there.”

“Well, at any rate, there go a couple of girls,” said Jessie.

“Telegraph girls, my dear! When I said ‘no woman’ I meant, of course, no gentlewoman.”

“I thought a gentlewoman could go anywhere,” put in Alison.

“My good child, where did you get that notion from?” asked Mrs. Bayliss, with severity.

“To confess the truth, mother,” said Alison, “I went through Mincing Lane yesterday afternoon by myself, and no one took the slightest notice of me. It is true,” she added, ingenuously, “I wasn’t wearing my new hat.”

“Yesterday! why I thought you and Jessie were at work in the square gardens.”

“So we were, but I’d been reading about these Lanes, and I wanted to see them; so as Jessie had found a nice little companion, I thought I would go out.”

“Tsh! tsh! tsh! what do you think your uncle John will say?”

“I know,” said Alison, “for I met him just by here, and he looked quite delighted to see me. He said, ‘Well Alison, I’m so glad to find you’ve come out alone!’ and he took me up Seething Lane and down a court, Black-raven Court, to show me the backs of some old houses there. And we talked about Mr. Pepys, who used to live in Seething Lane. (I had been reading some of his diary in the morning.) I told uncle John that I was going to invent names of my own for the City streets, and that in future I was going to call that turning ‘Pepys’ Lane.’ He looked so delightful. It was very kind of him to take up so much of his time with me. It was very interesting, everything is interesting about here, and I’m quite sure I could walk about the City all day without being noticed.”

“I never went up the business lanes by myself except on Sundays or of an evening when I was a girl,” said Mrs. Bayliss, emphatically.

“Ah, but mother,” said Alison, a humorous little smile playing in the sharp corners of her lips, “you were a pretty girl, that makes all the difference. Pretty girls can’t go where plain ones can.”

"Well, don't do it again, Alie," said Mrs. Bayliss, her sternness obviously melting.

She was a woman who never objected to being reminded of those good looks that were now no more, and her daughter's compliment, which was indeed to both of them but the unvarnished truth, softened her temper considerably for the rest of the little journey.

Always, always, my dear friend who may read this, always have a neat little store of pleasant truths at hand for your own relatives, if you would have your domestic life run smoothly.

Dear to most of us is a well-turned and approximately truthful compliment from any one, but doubly dear is it from members of our own family. Members of our own families please remember this: we really do like to hear pretty things from you, better than from nearly every one else. Alas! that we should hear them so rarely!

"Plain girls can go where pretty girls can't," said Alison; and before she had lived very long in the City she found that saying of hers had even more truth in it than she had at first thought. She felt perfectly safe and secure from notice when she was alone, but lost that sense of security as soon as Jessie

was with her. She nearly always kept to the main thoroughfares with Jessie ; she felt that Jessie was a charge, that she must take great care of her.

One morning, it was on a Monday, Trinity Monday, the two girls were returning about noon from their usual walk to St. Paul's, when, as the Tower was already within sight, they heard a loud but melodious peal of bells suddenly break out, high up above the roar of the mid-day traffic, into a chime that recalled to them the dear old nursery tune we have all sung to the familiar rhyme :

“ Oranges and lemons,  
Said the bells of St. Clement’s.”

“ What lovely bells ! ” the girls both exclaimed, simultaneously ; for having so recently come from Scotland a whole chime of bells was still something new and wonderful to them.

“ Which of all the many churches about here do they come from ? ” said Alison.

“ Ah, I know ! ” said Jessie, after a moment or two of listening, “ from the church at the corner, Barking Church, where, as Auntie told me yesterday, my poor parents were married. I wonder if the bells rang out so merrily for them on the pouring wet day on which they were married.”

"How do you know it was a wet day?" asked Alison.

"'Happy is the bride the sun shines on,'" said Jessie, "so it can't have shone on that day. Well, there's no wedding there now, in spite of the bells. The doors are fast locked or I'd go in," she added a few minutes later, as they paused for an instant before the grimy brick belfry of All Hallows', Barking, the old church at the junction of Tower Street and Seething Lane, from whose tower Mr. Pepys himself watched the burning of the Great Fire, the same old church beneath whose high altar his late Majesty King Edward the First believed that the heart of his Majesty's illustrious predecessor, King Richard the First, was buried (in which belief he erred, thereby proving that, even as early as the days of the Plantagenets, kings were fallible); the very same old church before whose modern porch Arnold Birkett had stood not many weeks before, longing for an annihilation that refused to come to him.

"Why are the bells ringing so, to-day, I wonder?" said Jessie. "Hark, there are others further off!"

"We'll soon find out," said Alison, eagerly; "uncle John is sure to know."

So they hurried through Barking Church-

yard, while overhead the bells rang out in the City-scented atmosphere.

Cast away care,  
Said the bells in the air:  
Why so much trouble?  
What's Life but a bubble?  
So, centuries marking,  
Said the sweet bells of Barking.

But I don't for one moment suppose the girls heard this jingling ryhme, nor had they much time to think of anything, for when they came to Catherine Court, just by their own new home, what should they see passing under the old iron-work of its entrance but a stately Beadle, carrying a large silver-headed wand, and leading a procession with a grandiose dignity to which no other functionary than a Beadle can by any possibility attain.

The procession was, always excepting the Beadle, by no means a stiff or formal one; it consisted of a number of gentlemen, who moved easily along and appeared to be on friendly terms with each other, although some wore the dress of ordinary civilians and others, the majority, a dark blue uniform, enlivened by gold braid and buttons.

"I know what it is; it's the Trinity Brethren going to church," cried Alison, catching sight of a distinctly clerical figure in the first rank of the procession.

"Jessie, we'll go with them! They can't

be going far!" Alison went on, for the sight of the procession made her eager to run after it. "Just let us tell mother, or she'll be wondering what has become of us. Make haste! We shall miss them, and I wouldn't miss them for anything. Make haste!"

"I don't think I want to go!" said Jessie, hesitating. "But of course if you do—oh, well, I don't care!" so lightly did Jessie decide upon taking what was really a very important step.

Not the slightest suspicion crossed her mind that she was really making a decision that was to effect all her future life.

The coming event cast at that moment no shadow on her. It was a matter of indifference to her whether she went or not.

"They won't trust me by myself," said Alison, "you must come with me. Make haste. Oh, there's mother! Can she be going?"

She was going, with her thickest veil drawn over her face, and her most funereal aspect.

"Mother, we've just seen the Trinity Brethren, and we—that is, I—want to go to church with them," said Alison, hurriedly.

"I'm going too. It is at St. Olave's, Hart Street, the church, Alison, where your dear father and I were married, our Parish Church."

Her words fell like a sudden chill upon the

girls. They both turned at once and went with her.

The Brethren and their attendant rabblement, for Alison was far from being the only person attracted by the sight, were passing out of the further end of Catherine Court when the ladies again saw them. They went a short distance along Seething Lane, into which Catherine Court leads, until they came to the great gate of St. Olave's Church-yard, known as The Gate of The Dead.

Another crowd had gathered there, but had parted to admit the Brethren, who were still passing under the gateway when Mrs. Bayliss and the girls arrived. They had to stand for a few minutes awaiting their turn.

The church-yard beside of the old grey tower of St. Olave's is at any time a picturesque opening among the tall warehouses of that City Lane, it seems like a little bit of country in the very heart of London.

On that brilliant summer morning the sun-lighted trees waved briskly in the breeze, while the bells of All Hallows, at the other end of the Lane, rang out their peel, and the bells of St. Olave's clashed and clangoured as the Brethren passed in to their annual service by the black Gate of The Dead, whose gloom no sunshine had power to relieve.

The Gate of The Dead ! The memorial of those who died in the Great Plague ! There it stood, tall, black, heathenish. As each living Brother went in, above his head grinned three skulls, set with a grimness almost grotesque, at the angles of two cross-bones, while another skull at each corner of the portal looked down on the divided crowd ; the whole of the gate being guarded by a repellent *chevaux-de-frise* like an army of impaled star-fish turned to grimy metal.

Hopeless, heathenish, as hopeless, as heathenish as if no Divine Voice, saying : “ I am the Resurrection and the Life,” had ever been heard in this world ; as hopeless and grim with the blackness of darkness as if for centuries those Divine Words had never once fallen on mourner’s ear in that very church-yard.

“ I shouldn’t like to come out by that gate if I were a bride ! ” thought Jessie, as she glanced up at the skulls.

“ By that gate James and I left the church, as bride and bridegroom,” thought Mrs. Bayliss as, all the brethren having passed in, she and the girls followed.

They crossed the church-yard that Mr. Pepys had found so terribly full after the Plague, into the Diarist’s “ Owne Church,” where he and his pretty wife were sleeping

a sleep far too profound for the loud peeling organ to disturb.

Within St. Olave's the *coup d'œil* was very bright and beautiful. Ancient as is the Church, no gloom, no must, no scent of dead men's bones was there. The form and colouring of the edifice itself were lovely.

St. Olave's is one of the few City churches that escaped the Great Fire. It is a singular fine example (as John Harbuckle would say) of the Fourteenth Century Perpendicular.

On that memorable Trinity Monday, as the bright sun was streaming in through the great windows, lighting up the dark grey-brown of the polished columns and arches, the vermillion of the stiff folds of certain kneeling Elizabethan figures, the white robes of clergy and choristers, the blue and gold of the Brethren, nothing could well be more charming than this time-honoured City Sanctuary.

With some difficulty they found seats, Alison and her mother together, Jessie in front of them, with a silvered-haired and very literally Elder Brother beside her, and two others nearly as old before her.

It was pretty, when the service began and they all stood up to see Jessie the centre of that white-headed group, Jessie in her cotton

dress of soft grey, for she was scarcely out of mourning, Jessie so young and fresh and fair!

Presently the service grew special. There came a grand psalm about the sea, and Jessie's face became more serious as she followed the verses that described the storm :

“They that go down to the sea in ships,  
that do business in great waters—

“They mount up to heaven, they go down to  
the depths : their soul is melted because of  
trouble.”

With all these sea-faring men around, her childish grief for her father's shipwreck came back vividly, with the shuddering horror that she had often felt when she had opened *In memoriam* at the words :

“And hands so often clasp'd in mine,  
Should toss with tangle and with shell.”

and she saw herself, once more a little child, on her father's knee, and again lived through the catastrophe that had killed her mother.

During the prayers she grew very conscious, too, of the figure in black widow's weeds that was kneeling so close behind her, and of the shadowy bridal that her imagination saw grouped about the altar. It oppressed her, it dimmed for her even that bright morning.

Then the sermon was all about the dangers of the sea, and the noble work of the Con-

fraternity, in trying to preserve life around our coasts ; that also made her feel “eerie.” When she stood up to sing the beautiful hymn, “For those in peril on the sea,” which is always so touching, everywhere something seemed to choke her utterance. She heard the grand melody ascending in its grave half-tones, but though her heart went deeply with the words, she had no voice to sing :

“ Oh hear us when we cry to Thee  
For those in peril on the sea ; ”

and Alison, looking at her, and herself also much moved, thought that Jessie had grown from pretty to beautiful.

The service was ended, the organ pealed out the National Anthem, the Brethren departed.

“ Mother, may I stay to look at the monuments ? ” asked Alison, under her voice. “ I know Mrs. Pepys is somewhere in here. I’m sure I can come home alone quite safely, it is no distance.”

“ Very well ; but don’t be long. Come, Jessie ; ” and as soon as the crowd had lessened, Mrs. Bayliss and her niece left the Church, went through the Church-yard and reached THE GATE OF THE DEAD.

Whom, or what had they seen ? The widow

grasped the girl's arm tightly, and Jessie turning quickly to her aunt, showed lips half-opened in terror and amazement, and eyes wide with a strange, wild questioning.

"You're not well, Auntie!" cried Jessie, drawing her aunt's arm firmly under her own. But her voice sounded strange, hardly like her own. "Let us get home quickly!"

She looked hastily on each side of the crowd there was no face there she recognised —*that face* had vanished.

"The service has tried me very much," said Mary Bayliss, faintly, as they left Seething Lane for Catherine Court. "All this place is too dreadful to me! I ought not to have been forced to come to it! Oh Jessie!" —and she gasped for breath—"I thought —Jessie!—I saw a man so like your father as we were under that gate! and your father was so like my dearest James. It must have been that church! That church where we were married."

"I oughtn't to have gone there—and poor Arthur was there with us, and so was your mother. Why, Jessie, how you are trembling, my dear!"

"Because——" said Jessie, shuddering; "oh, Auntie, Auntie! I saw two eyes—two eyes in the crowd, and they—oh, they brought my

father back to me! Do you think it means that something dreadful has happened to Mac? Is it a sign? Oh Auntie, Auntie, make haste home! I feel as if I should drop down dead."

## CHAPTER III.

“WHAT KILLED HER?”

“BEAUTIES are frauds! I’ve seen Mrs. Pepys, and she isn’t half as pretty as Jessie!” exclaimed Alison, bursting into the dining-room, in a great state of excitement, about a quarter of an hour after the others had returned.

Alison had seen no ghost, there was no terror in her grey eyes, she had had a few minutes alone among the monuments of the church, and a delightful little walk home all by herself, and was looking and feeling radiantly blissful as she pushed open the door, when her glance falling upon Mrs. Bayliss and Jessie, who were huddled up together in a corner of the sofa, her face suddenly changed.

“What’s happened?” she asked, a dread of evil tidings rushing over her heart.

“We don’t know; we’ve been frightened,” cried Jessie, her voice and face still quivering with terror.

"Frightened? Nearly run over? You're not hurt are you?" asked Alison.

"No—no—oh, Alie, we saw—both of us saw—some one with eyes just like my father's!"

"*Jessie!*" exclaimed Alison, with a start, and then she paused and looked very grave.

"That's strange!" she said, presently, "that's very strange! for the other day—I didn't like to speak of it, but I've thought of it several times—the day I went through Mincing Lane by myself—I heard a voice that distinctly recalled to me my own father's!"

"*Your* father's!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, with a stress of horror on the pronoun.

"Yes, and it startled me, for my mind was just then full of the City," said Alison.

"There was a strong family-likeness between the brothers, especially their voices," said Mrs. Bayliss with a shiver.

"Ah well," said Alison, trying to turn off the subject, "I suppose it was only a fancy or a coincidence; of course it couldn't have been anything else, only it's strange it should have occurred to us all. I'm very sorry you have both been so upset. Come up to the table and try to take some lunch; here's some claret to begin with," and she poured out a couple of glasses.

*“WHAT KILLED HER?”*

“I feel better now you’ve come home to take care of us, Alie,” said Jessie, holding out her hand to her cousin; “but I’m afraid I shall lead you a dreadful life; I shan’t be able even to go up and down stairs by myself now. I feel sure something must have happened in Scotland! It must be a sign!”

“How can you encourage yourself in such silly fancies,” said Alison. “Really, Jessie, you ought to know better.”

“Ah, it’s all very fine for you, you haven’t had your nerves ruined as mine have been!” said Jessie, looking up with her beautiful frightened eyes at Alison’s firm figure.

It was for the time very firm, as she was conscious that she had those two others to reassure and protect; for them she would have faced any number of ghosts or burglars.

“Well, never mind,” said Alison, “come up stairs now and take your hat and jacket off properly.”

“‘Properly!’ The idea of Alison’s talking about doing anything properly!” said Jessie, with an attempt to laugh off her fright; which indeed was rapidly giving way before Alison’s calm, protecting presence. “Don’t you want taking care of, Auntie? Won’t you be frightened to be left alone?”

“Frightened!” exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss,

with a sudden intensity of feeling ; “ frightened ! No ! I’d give—what would I not give to see the faintest shadow of my darling again ?—and his brother was so much like him ! Go, Jessie, dear child ; I’d sooner be alone.”

And when she was alone she tried her hardest to see her husband, but no effort of will, or love, or imagination would bring him back ; there was no faint shadow of him in any corner of that room ; he was gone too immeasurably far away.

During the remainder of the day, Jessie refused to be parted at all from Alison, she also refused to go with her into the Tower Gardens, although Alison wanted very much to count if there really were the twelve towers mentioned in the books. So they spent a couple of hours on the wonderful piece of greensward in front of the Trinity House, where they sat under the trees at work.

“ And where,” said Jessie, “ the sun shines too brightly, and the nice little children play too merrily, for one to feel eerie by any possibility. But you’re not to read, Alison, you understand, I can’t have you reading ; you must bring out your work and talk to me,” said Jessie.

It was late at night before Mrs. Bayliss had

any opportunity of conversing with her brother, for he dined that evening with the clothworkers.

He had stayed later than usual in the office, and had only left himself time to dress ; so that he had gone out without hearing of the incident which had so startled his relatives.

Mary, determined to be much alone that evening, sent off the girls at their usual early hour.

When they were gone, the room seemed very desolate. But to Mary Bayliss desolation had become a sort of luxury.

She sat in the same room in which we first saw her brother, John Harbuckle.

The same argand burner, now adorned with a new crimson silk shade and fringe, that had thrown a disk of light on to "the few lines" he had been writing to his antiquarian friend, now illuminated the Bible that lay open before his sister. She was not reading that Bible, for although she believed that she had opened it to read, she had in reality placed it there as a sort of charm. She would not have shrunk from going through Hades in search of her James Bayliss, but she would have tried to take her Bible with her as a protection.

Was she superstitious ? Had you asked her the question she would have answered indignantly that she was perhaps the least

superstitious woman in all the world. She was not at all conscious that she was using the Bible as a charm, or an amulet, but the book being there she felt protected by it; although she would stoutly have denied that she required any protection.

“Come! Come! Only come! If you would but come! Come, only come! Only let me know that you are here! Only let me know that you feel I was good to you! Ah! Once I did—once I said—I was unkind”—and then, with bitter self-reproaches, she confessed many a little word or act that still rankled in her memory.

But he never came, nor made any sign. The night breeze through the open window stirred the leaves of the sacred Book; the old-fashioned clock, with a roof like a pagoda, ticked sharply on the mantelpiece; the widow peered into the dim corners with eyes whose tears had all been shed long ago, but there was nothing; he never came!

And yet the face that had flashed across her that very day as she stood under the Gate of The Dead, that face had brought him back to her!

Ever since she had seen it she had been imploring for another sight of it!

In the bright sunshine, at mid-day, she had

seen that face—that face, not his, but so like his, and now in the still night it would not come!

It is difficult to recall the faces of those whom we best know and love. We pass a stranger in the street, we are struck with some peculiarity, we remember it for ever. But the familiar face that has gone, how shall we bring it back? Out of the thousand expressions we have seen it wear which shall we dwell upon? we are bewildered, we know not where to fix our thought; we have watched it from youth to age, from health to sickness, perhaps to death—it is no longer one, it is a panorama of faces, it is years—a life—a life merged into our own and yet—gone. We cannot understand it. It is a mystery; but, oh for a sight of the vanished face once more!

“Come! Come, in any form, only come!” But there was no response; she sat alone, breaking her heart, until at length her brother’s slow step was heard on the landing, and he opened the door.

“All alone, Mary!” John Harbuckle exclaimed, looking round the room.

“Yes, John, all alone,” echoed the widow, with a sigh.

“I thought the girls would be up,” said John, as if slightly disappointed. “Here’s

the Company's box of sweets for them. Never mind, the morning will be time enough for me to give it them. You seem very tired, Mary, so am I; I think I'll say good night, my dear."

"I am not more tired than usual," returned Mary, "but, I've something to tell you."

John Harbuckle took one of the large arm-chairs which were now in general use, and leaned back in it.

Mary turned towards him :

"You know we all went to St. Olave's with the Trinity Brethren," she began. "Alison stayed behind us a few minutes to look at the monuments; and as Jessie and I were coming out, just as we were under that old gate, we both of us saw a face in the crowd that reminded us of James's poor brother Arthur, Jessie's father. Jessie was terribly frightened, poor child; she said, 'she saw two eyes in the crowd that brought her father back to her; they brought my James back to me.'

"Strange!" muttered John Harbuckle.

"Strange! That's what Alison said when we told her. She, too, turned grave all at once, and said she had been startled by a voice that recalled her own father's."

"To-day?" asked John, with hardly his usual deliberation.

"No, when she went down Mincing Lane, last week."

John Harbuckle opened his eyes wide :

"And the face you saw?" he asked, as if cross-examining a witness.

"I only saw it for an instant in the crowd. It was not exactly like either James or Arthur, but it recalled them both. Jessie's term was the right one. It brought them both back to me. They were very much alike."

"Strange!" repeated John, as if preoccupied ; "very strange!" He was silent for a few moments.

"Mary," he said, with profound gravity, after a long pause, "I also have something to tell you. On the evening I wrote the letter that brought you all here, I walked for some considerable time in the Tower Gardens, thinking of other days, and of those who had lived in them. Perhaps I had been dwelling on certain memories too long and too seriously — perhaps I was haunted by the voices of those who had much to do in making my life what it is; but, however that may be, when I left the Gardens to post a letter that I had suddenly remembered was in my pocket, I passed a cab, over there by St. Catherine's Docks, the wheel of which cab was locked within the wheel of a heavy van. A man

called out of the cab to the driver! Mary—if Arthur Bayliss had not been, to the best of my belief, at the bottom of the sea I would have sworn to that voice! It is one I can never forget."

"John!" exclaimed Mary Bayliss, grasping the edge of the table, and leaning with painful eagerness towards her brother; "John!"

"I could have sworn to that voice!" repeated John Harbuckle, emphatically.

"What can it mean?" gasped Mary.

"Had they any relatives—cousins, for instance?" asked John.

"There were but two brothers, and their father was an only son, an only child, indeed."

"If it's a mere coincidence it is certainly a strange one," said John, slowly.

"*If* it's a coincidence! If it isn't, what is it?"

"Ah!——" with a long sigh John Harbuckle put his elbow on the arm of the chair and leaned his head upon his hand for a while.

Mary sat opposite, peering keenly into his face as if to read his thoughts.

"Did a doubt about Arthur Bayliss's death ever cross your mind?" John asked, at length, very slowly and solemnly.

"I never doubted but that he was really dead," replied Mary without hesitation; but

both her tone and her words prompted John to say, with almost judicial severity :

“ You had a doubt. What was it you doubted ? ”

She did not answer readily. The clock struck the hour as fast as it could, as if in a hurry to get it over.

“ What was it you doubted ? ” John asked, with slow but incisive utterance, and he turned more directly towards his sister.

“ I don’t know. The whole affair was strange,” she answered, hardly avoiding his gaze, but not positively meeting it.

“ True ! It was strange ; very strange things happen every day,” said John, as if to himself. “ But your specific doubt, Mary ? you never doubted his death ; what then did you doubt ? ” he went on, with a return of his keen, scrutinising tone, as he fixed his clear eyes on his sister.

“ I never doubted but that poor Jessie was a widow,” returned Mary. “ But since I’ve been a widow myself I’ve known that it was not a widow’s grief that killed her.”

“ Then what did kill her ? —for killed she was ! ” said John, and indignation as well as grief might have been detected under his quiet words.

“ Remorse ! ” said Mary, in her deepest tone.

“Remorse!” exclaimed John Harbuckle, suddenly starting into an upright position. “Absurd! Nonsense! Rubbish! Sickly dreaming! Remorse? What could the poor thing have done to cause her remorse? She was—she—she—she was good—yes she was, Mary; she was good—good and conscientious!”

“So conscientious that her conscience killed her, poor dear!” said Mary.

“I can’t understand that,” said John.

“Neither can I, but I am persuaded that so it was,” said his sister.

“Your reasons, Mary?”

“You saw her once or twice after the news of Arthur’s death had come. Was there not something about her unlike a widow’s grief?”

“Aye, there was!” muttered John, the look of horror with which she had recoiled from him when he had for the second time asked her to be his wife, rising before his mind.

“What was it?” asked Mary.

“Monomania. Grief had turned her brain.”

“*Grief*—yes, and something besides grief! Heaven knows how bitterly I’ve reproached myself over and over again for many a thoughtless, unkind word to my Jaines!” Mary went on, her self-control deserting her all at once. “Many and many a night I have

wept for hours over words and deeds I'd give my life to recall! I know how madly one reproaches oneself! one never can be kind enough to satisfy one's own conscience; but, oh John, to-night as I have been thinking of it all, I feel I am beginning to think that there must have been some terrible secret, some great wrong somewhere! Poor Jessie, whatever it was, it killed her!"

"You admit she was in a morbid state of mind?"

"Of course. There can't be a doubt about it, but still—but still——"

"Such a state of mind is invariably accompanied by an exaggerated estimate of everything. You must give that consideration its due weight."

"I do; but the more I think of it, the more I am convinced that there was a secret—a terrible secret—and that that secret killed poor Jessie!"

"Poor thing! Well, thank God, she is at peace now!"—he paused. "If there was a wrong it must have been with him, not with her," he went on, then paused again. "She was fond of him?"

He asked the question with a pang of the old jealousy.

"Devotedly."

“ He was good to her ? ”

“ They seemed a model pair.”

“ There were money troubles.” This was no question, but an affirmation.

“ Yes, and it would appear as if he were running away from his creditors when he went down in the ‘ Mellacurrie.’ ”

“ A sad affair altogether ! I never quite understood it,” said John. “ I never saw much of him, but I always heard of him as an honourable man of business, whose misfortunes were not of his own making ; but men do strange things when they are driven into a corner. I can hardly think that he can be living after all these years of silence. Good night, Mary.” And John Harbuckle rose abruptly and went off to his own room.

## CHAPTER IV.

“OFT IN THE STILL NIGHT.”

“IT’S the mystery, my dear,” Mrs. Tildesley of “Crow’s Nest,” Lambrooke, had oracularly observed to her husband, after Arnold Birkett’s first visit.

But, whatever that mystery may have been, it did not prevent Mr. and Mrs. Tildesley from taking a deep and kindly interest in their new friend and his affairs.

Arnold Birkett seemed for a while quite content to follow their advice, so, after much consultation with the husband, he took offices in that newly erected block of buildings, Fenchurch Avenue, Fenchurch Street; and, following Mrs. Tildesley’s advice, rooms in Hawthorne Cottage, a picturesque little dwelling within half-a-mile of “Crow’s Nest,” and not by any means expensive.

“I am throwing nearly all my capital into my business venture,” he said to Mrs. Tildesley, when he consulted her about his leaving the Bridgewater; “and as I’m quite alone

and don't care for personal extravagance, a quiet little place would suit me best."

So she found him Hawthorne Cottage. These arrangements having been made, Arnold Birkett plunged every morning boldly, into the mighty rushing stream of City life, and every evening did his best to rest on his chosen little bit of that stream's quiet suburban banks.

Arnold Birkett came down to live at Hawthorne Cottage in the most unobtrusive way possible, but strange to relate he had not been there many weeks before, quite unconsciously, he had caused something amounting to a stir in Lambrooke; so much so, that it was soon currently reported that, although no longer young, he was running both the curate and the new doctor very close in the interest he had awakened in the local mind; indeed his public was soon a wider one than that dominated by either of the just named professional men.

The old rector and his set were interested in him because he held the orthodox views of a good long while ago, except on the subject of African Missions, which exception formed excellent debating ground and prevented the monotony of continual acquiescence; the doctor found him intelligent on fevers and the

diseases of the natives ; young Tildesley, who lived in one of the turnings off the Lambrooke Road, appreciated his cigars ; the men in general found him a pleasant companion and, for Lambrooke, an uncommonly good talker ; the women gave him their sympathy, feeling that he was neither well nor happy ; the girls declared that he had still fine eyes and a pathetic tenor voice ; moreover, it is said (but I hold it to be a libel invented and circulated by a wretched man, whom jealousy had rendered malicious) that some of the unmarried women declared it was too bad of Mrs. Tildesley to allow no one but herself to play Mr. Birkett's accompaniments.

A "small beer chronicle," extending over many pages, might very well come in here, but as any dweller in the suburbs can supply it out of his or her own experience, why should I spend my valuable time upon it ? I have said enough to show that had Arnold Birkett been anxious to become a popular man, he could very easily have attained such distinction in the neighbourhood of Lambrooke.

Arnold Birkett, however, cared but little for social success. He accepted it as a right and as a thing to which he had always been accustomed. He was soon intimate with men in every way more desirable than Mr.

Tildesley ; but he always gave his first friend the preference.

Many residents in Lambrooke competed for the honour of entertaining him, but his fidelity to Mrs. Tildesley remained unswerving ; and she deserved his constancy, she was a very nice woman and took a deep interest in him and his mystery.

When Arnold Birkett had first gone into the City, on his return from Africa, he had often wished that his offices were further away from the Tower Gardens than they were, but he soon grew used to its position, and that too-well remembered place ceased to have any particular interest for him. Fenchurch Avenue, that brand span new locality, was so altogether different from any street or lane that had ever existed in the City in his earlier days, that it was at times difficult for him, when there, to believe he was in London at all. In fact, what with the novelty of his surroundings, and the anxiety and excitement of his new venture, he had little time during business hours for unpleasant reflections.

It was after business was over, when at the station, he saw crowds of men hurrying away, laden with small luxuries for home consumption ; it was when he heard them chatting about wives and children, when going along

the Lambrooke Road, he often saw them fondly welcomed back after their day's work ; it was then he sometimes wished that the earth would open and swallow him up. He never took back anything for himself to Hawthorne Cottage. When he returned he generally lay on the sofa with his face to the wall for half an hour or more, weary, miserable, and alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Trinity Monday was a fine day. It had been bright even among the City lanes, it was brighter in the purer air of Lambrooke.

On Trinity Monday Arnold Birkett returned from Town rather earlier than usual. He was not feeling well ; his day in the City had fatigued him very much, and had been extremely exciting to him. So instead of walking back to the cottage, he mounted the local omnibus.

In the state of health he was in just then, anything would have made him melancholy. Doubtless, if he had then had the most loving wife, he would have said or done something to make her wretched five minutes after his arrival at home. He knew perfectly well what was the matter with him, but that did not prevent his being hurt when he saw the wife of

the owner of “*Inglenook*” meet her husband in a front garden where thousands of forget-me-nots were blooming in the borders; nor from feeling half choked when he noticed many children’s small fingers drumming on the nursery windows of “*Plinlimmon*” to their father, as he descended from the top of the omnibus at his own gate. Little knew the owners of the chubby fingers how they were also drumming on the heart of one of their father’s fellow passengers!

Arnold Birkett was suffering from what he called “an attack,” although in a far milder one than the illness at the Tavistock. He was paying the penalty that most Englishmen have to pay for a few years’ residence in the tropics. Nothing on earth could have given him pleasure; but the quiet domesticity he witnessed and imagined, filled him with envy and made him worse.

“The only comfort is,” he said to himself, “it can’t last much longer. I was a fool to come back at all. I wish that last fever had killed me. The sooner it’s all over the better!”

He lay down on the sofa in his little sitting-room, as soon as he reached the Cottage, and tried to sleep but could not. He had been ill and out of temper all day, every trifle had

annoyed him; several things that were not trifles had occurred; they preyed on his mind, he could not get rid of them; he could not get rid of the City, he had brought it home with him; he seemed still to be hurrying along its streets and lanes. He turned his face to the wall, but the past day would not be shut out; he was so tired and ill, it was a misery to him to have to move or think, but rest would not come. After a while the scene in front of the grim old Gate of The Dead separated itself from the crowd of other scenes that thronged his mind. He had walked from his office in Fenchurch Avenue, to Tower Street, by Mark Lane, Hart Street, and Seething Lane; an affair not of much importance but of an annoying nature had made him take that route, that annoying affair had occupied all his thought at the time.

As he had passed the Church-yard gate his eyes and brain had received the impression of what he had seen, but at the time he was too much irritated to take any particular notice of anything, as he had hastily glanced up and then hurried through the crowd.

The special cause of the annoyance was gone now. As Arnold Birkett lay on the sofa with his face to the wall the scene rose vividly

before him, bright, clear, full of life and sunshine. It had a strange fascination for him ; and, in his mind, it was accompanied by a sort of shadow in which there were the same grim gateway, and a blurred and misty crowd; but in the bright fresh picture he had seen that day there was a widow and in its shadow the remembrance of a *bride*.

Thinking of these scenes at last he fell asleep. It was the cool of the evening when he awoke. He felt better, turned round to the lonely room, hated the sight of it, resolved to go and smoke a cigar with Tildesley, and to talk over one or two things while so doing.

Abroad, he and the few Europeans near him had been in the habit of “ meeting up” of an evening. He was used to society of an evening and did not feel right without it.

He went down the broad suburban road to “ Crow’s Nest.” It was a lovely sunset ; he found the Tildesleys sitting out on the lawn, and stayed there talking, until it grew dusk, then they went in and there was the usual little bit of music.

Arnold Birkett had always a pathetic tenor; that evening, as he sang a well-known ballad

to Mrs. Tildesley's accompaniment, his voice was absolutely full of tears. Nothing could have sounded more heart-broken than his refrain :

"Thy face I never see.  
Thy face I never see."

Mrs. Tildesley, kind woman, felt very sorry for him, and afterwards remarked to herself that it was highly creditable to him and a thing you don't often meet with, to find a man mourning for a wife who had been dead nearly eight years. She wished very much to speak her mind to her husband on the subject, but forbore. She was a prudent woman—Mr. Tildesley had proposed to her about four months after his first wife's decease.

Mrs. Tildesley's feelings having been aroused by Arnold Birkett's harrowing ballad and tearful voice, followed him by the song perhaps the most capable to stirring up the past of any ever written.

Her voice was good and well trained, but now much of it had gone, and she had the sense to know it had gone. She sang nothing but the simplest songs ; but she gave them with a very distinct articulation and with much simplicity.

Arnold Birkett heard every one of the well-known words she sang ; they and their lovely

melody haunted him, and came only too true that very evening :

“Oft in the stilly night,  
Ere slumber’s chain has bound me,  
Fond mem’ry brings the light  
Of other days around me.  
The smiles, the tears of boyhood’s years,  
The words of love then spoken;  
The eyes that shone now dimm’d and gone,  
The cheerful hearts now broken.  
Thus in the stilly night,  
Ere slumber’s chain hath bound me,  
Fond mem’ry brings the light  
Of other days around me.”

Returning to Hawthorne Cottage that “stilly night,” “the light of other days” falling full on his life as the moonbeams on the quiet gardens by the road side, the scene in the City Lane came back to him once more ; but now all was vague and shadowy except one face beneath the dim old portal—a girl’s face it was that grew to him each moment, brighter, sweeter, more real—it was the *face of Jessie Bayliss*.

## CHAPTER V.

### RETRIBUTION.

ARNOLD BIRKETT'S temper was subject to violent alternations. On the Trinity Monday it had been simply dreadful. Early in the morning, having no one else to insult and abuse, he had cursed himself and his fate very freely. During that day the veriest trifles had irritated him almost beyond endurance; it seemed that everybody insulted him; everything annoyed him; the whole arrangement of the world at large was devised on purpose to spite him; the universe itself owed him a grudge and was letting him know it.

“Life’s too hard ; everything’s against me !”

After that song and the quiet walk in the “stilly night,” this irritation gave way to a profound yet gentle melancholy. Going up to town in the morning, he listened with so sympathizing an expression to a tale of woe, that the narrator was emboldened to ask for a subscription, and got it at once. No trifles

annoyed him that day, he was very sorry for anyone who was in trouble.

He was, however, in no frame of mind for business. Had he been left to himself he might perhaps have done absolutely nothing for the whole morning. But while he was sitting at his desk, with his head buried in his hands, one of Mr. Tildesley's clerks came in with an exciting message. An article of colonial produce, that had been gradually rising in the market, was moving up rapidly ; the rest of that day, until five o'clock, Arnold Birkett spent in rushing after it, amidst a crowd of eager buyers. The beautiful young face that had come to him in "the stilly night" was driven out of his thoughts, until what seemed to him a sufficient quantity of that article had, with much difficulty, been caught and bought.

Arnold Birkett may possibly, have seen enough of Mr. Tildesley during that day's chase ; certain it is that he did not return with him to Lambrooke by his usual train. Certain it also is that when business was over, he called the care-taker of the house in Fenchurch Avenue into his office and had a long talk with him ; which resulted in their both going upstairs and looking at a couple of very good unfurnished rooms at the top of the house.

"Plenty of light and air here," he remarked. "Well, I'll think of these rooms. It's a long way down to Lambrooke if one is detained in town or if one wants to go to the theatre. I'll think of these rooms. They'll be let reasonably, I suppose, they're too far up for business purposes, and no one makes a home of the City now."

He went down to his office again, wrote a few letters and then left the place.

The great blocks of offices were all closed when he left the Avenue : traffic was still going on in Fenchurch Street and the main thoroughfares, but the lanes were deserted.

Arnold Birkett passed the gate-way of St. Olave's; it was closed. The crowd was gone ; the street was empty, the black skulls stared vacantly at the gigantic rainbow-hued letters which, on the high dead wall opposite, announced a popular play.\*

He paused an instant, then went through Catherine Court and so on to Tower Hill.

By Barking Alley he found the old crossing sweeper just preparing to leave for home, like the rest of the City people. A few bonded carmen were still at work on the raised level

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\*At the time this was written, facing the Gate of the Dead was the one word "YOUTH."

It was a grim contrast.

before the block of warehouses, but for most, even of them, the day's toil was over.

Arnold Birkett felt that he had no right to be there at such an hour. He, like everyone else, ought to be at home or at least going home. Why was he different from everyone else?—why was he not going home? Simply because he had no home to go to. He could not think of Hawthorne Cottage as home. There was no beloved being there to turn his rooms into his home.

He went up to the crossing sweeper and gave her a shilling. Her face beamed with delight and recognition as she curtseyed low.

“There’s ladies come to Mr. Harbuckle’s now, sir,” she said, in her ghost of a voice.

“Indeed! How many?”

“Three, sir. One which I wouldn’t like to say she were igxactly old, and two of the nicest young ladies I iver see.”

“I hope they remember you sometimes,” said Mr. Birkett.

“Bless their pretty faces! they do, sir,” she exclaimed with a benign smile; “an’ I pray to all the Saints for em’ ivery night, sir, as I’ve been a doing for you, sir, since I last saw you. But it’s been a bad day for me intoirely this; folks thinks when it’s fine me and me poor childer don’t want nothing; and it’s

no tay-leaves nor broken bits, nor nothing I'll get from Mr. Harbuckle's now Mrs. Robbins's gone, spite of the pretty young ladies. Sure if it wasn't for the likes of a gentleman like you coming along now and again, I'd be starved."

"Do you happen to know their names?" asked Mr. Birkett.

The woman shook her head and Mr. Birkett passed on, a shower of murmured benedictions following him; while the sweeper was repeating in her heart a few of the soubriquets, quite unfit for publication, by which Mrs. Robbin's had been in the habit of designating Mrs. Bayliss.

After he had gone some yards, he furtively glanced over his shoulder, and noticing that the sweeper had departed, he recrossed the road and keeping along the footpath that surrounds the gardens of Trinity Square, was soon opposite John Harbuckle's house.

The door was shut, business there as elsewhere was over for the day. He looked up at the windows, no one was to be seen, but fresh flowers in the window-boxes and fresh lace curtains behind them gave the house a certain home-like aspect it had wanted on the April morning when he had last noticed it.

I say "noticed," because he had since then walked by it many times when his mind had

been occupied with other affairs, and when that house had had no particular interest for him.

“That, I suppose, is still the dining-room,” he said to himself, looking up earnestly at two open windows on the first floor. “And she, no doubt, is there at this very moment! and I can’t see her!—I, to whom she belongs!”

He looked at the windows as if they were mesmerizing him.

“She may be there!” He felt indeed she *must* be there.

“Bitterly, bitterly, I’ve been punished! Is my punishment to last for ever? Is there never forgiveness? Why may I not see her? Why may I not claim her? Is she not mine? My all—now? All that remains to me of the wreck of my old affections?”

He turned abruptly as if he had wrenched himself away with a terrible effort.

“To be so near, and yet, like a dead man out of sight,” he said, as he entered Catherine Court, in which there was then no one else.

He walked up and down for some time in great agitation:

“Ah!” he said; “it’s a frightful thing to come back from the dead! What shall I do? What can I do? *Now*, she thinks of me as a saint with her mother in heaven! How can I tell her all, poor child? Why did I return?

Shall I go to John Harbuckle and tell him all ? I can't ! He's too good to enjoy the triumph, but I can't ! I couldn't face him ! He could forgive me for wronging him, but never for so hurting her ! Impossible ! I meant to have taken more time to have tried to put myself right with the world first !—Shall I go back to Lambrooke ? Ah ! that old house, and the worn steps, and her little feet ! The door-way where she used to watch for me of an evening when all was quiet as it is now ! *She* would have welconied me ! *She* would have forgiven me, without one reproach !—*She* loved me better than her life, and I killed her ! I deserve my fate ! Why should I break in upon the happiness of those others ! They are happy enough ! Oh yes, they are happy ; every-one is happy except me ! They have mourned, but they are comforted by this time ! Why should I go and trouble them ? Let the dead past bury its dead, and me along with the rest ! ”

After he had taken many a turn up and down the court, always looking along Tower Hill each time he came to the entrance under the worn iron-work, he perceived that he had attracted the notice of a policeman. He paused somewhere in the middle of the court and debated for a moment, whether he should

leave it by the Seething Lane gateway and return to Lambrooke, or whether he should continue watching John Harbuckle's house.

"I must see her," he decided. "It's a sweet evening; between now and nine o'clock they are sure to come out. I must see her face once more, if but for a moment."

He passed John Harbuckle's house again, again looked up at the windows. No one was to been seen. No sound of voices from within could reach him. He went on under the shade of the plane trees, of which the leaves were fluttering gently in the warm western glow, until he came to the gate of the square gardens, where he stopped for some time. Then he came back again, and then again returned to the gate. Not a creature was to be seen in the gardens. If he could only have been permitted to enter and wait on that sun-lighted velvety turf the lengthening shadows were crossing! Surely in all Europe there can be no City so selfishly arranged as is London! London is essentially a town for people who have homes, woe be to the wanderers there! There were plenty of seats within the gardens both of the square and the Tower, but they were reserved for those who had homes and chairs and sofas near at hand. Arnold Birkett, and doubtless many others, would have been

thankful for the humblest bench outside the railings, but of course there was none ; had there been, it is probable that some of the men who were spending their evening (after a long day's toil on the wharves) standing at the corners of the City lanes or at the bars of public houses, might have taken that bench, which would have been very undesirable. Oh, cruel London town ! There was consequently nothing for Arnold Birkett to do but prowl about the square and in and out its courts in the least obtrusive manner he could. This is a difficult task when it extends over an hour and a half. It was past eight when he at length saw the long-watched door open, and John Harbuckle follow the two girls down the steps.

Only a elderly man with a slow step, and two girls, simply clad in something soft and grey, but after one glimpse of them the houses and trees met before Arnold Birkett's eyes and shut them out again, and then opened, disclosing them, blurred and indistinct. They sauntered in the direction of the Tower. He followed them afar off. They entered the gardens by the gate opposite the bonded warehouses. They went to the bench under the acacias and were lost to Birkett among the trees.

“It is remarkably beautiful this evening,”

observed John Harbuckle, gazing with calm contented pleasure and affection on the ramparts and houses by the Beauchamp Tower. "Nothing can be finer ! I have advised Mr. Woolcomb's son to make an etching of it from this point of view. He says he will, but has not done so yet."

"Yes, it's beautiful ; but don't stay to look at it, please, uncle John," said Jessie, uneasily. "I know it was over there they cut off Anne Boleyn's head. And Alison says some prisoner used to sit by that little slit in the wall and watch the river; and Lady Jane Grey's husband used to walk on the leads of that Beauchamp Tower ; and his brother, who married Amy Robsart, was in prison there ! Come away ! I don't like those things, they make me feel eerie. Let us walk up and down, or go round to the lawn opposite the Mint ; I like the docks and the lawn better!"

If Jessie had but seen the eyes that were peering with such painful eagerness through the bushes in search of her face !

John Harbuckle and the girls strolled on slowly along the walk above the moat. Arnold Birkett noticed them moving, and followed them by the path outside the railings. Between them was a deep slope with trees and bushes now in full leaf.

He watched them ; they strolled along as leisurely as if by the Birren water, instead of by that ever-flowing stream of London life that was within so few yards of them.

Presently, through a gap among the shrubs, he saw them all distinctly ; and then, for the moment, all around them grew blurred and dark again, the three figures looked to him taller than the White Tower itself, then faded and reappeared.

“ Which is she ? ” he asked himself, and forgetting all else, even his caution, he looked eagerly towards them.

Just then John Harbuckle stopped, raised his hand, and pointed to the one round turret of the White Tower.

They all turned away from the eyes that were watching them, and faced the great pile beyond the moat. All those eyes could see were two plaits of brown hair under two grey hats.

The last rays of the sun were filling the back windows of the brick houses on the historic Green with burning panes, and lighting up the crowns and pennants of the vanes of the four turrets to most pure gold, and covering the turrets themselves with a bloom like the bloom of damsons. The elderly man in black, the girls in grey, stood almost as still as the glorified buildings.

Did nothing tell John Harbuckle and those girls who was so near? Nothing! He was far from the thoughts of all of them.

John Harbuckle, pointing to the round north east turret, began to relate, in his somewhat prosy way, the sad story of a now nearly forgotten heroine, Matilda Fitzwalter, of Castle Baynard, who was imprisoned in that same round turret, where, says tradition, she was poisoned, by order of King John, for being brave and virtuous.

As he talked they all went into a summer-house facing the Devereux Tower, at the north-west angle of the inner ward, where the path turns sharply.

They were lost again to the watcher; it filled him with despair:

“Am I never to see her?” he said, looking down to the roof of the summer-house, over which a weeping ash projected like a fan. Beyond was the moat and a great bastion, grim with weather-staines, on which paced a sentry, seen now and again between the battlements, behind the battlements stood the grey tower where Elizabeth’s Essex once was captive. It was all nothing to Arnold Birkett. He only knew Jessie was hidden from him.

“I shall certainly go down Thames Street and look up Castle Baynard,” said Alison, as

John Harbuckle concluded his narrative. "I think I might get a little paper out of that. Wasn't it splendid that her father was the first baron to sign the Magna Charta? Serve King John right!"

"Is is true that King John was all day signing his name?" asked Jessie, with a sort of childish simplicity she affected on these matters; "because I've been told he was; and I've seen a friend of mine play at it. It was very amusing—my friend was, I mean."

"*You* are very amusing!" said John Harbuckle, with a pronounced smile.

"King John's been white-washed, you know!" he went on; "but I prefer my history in its traditional form, I like my heroes white and my villains black. They buried her at Little Dunmow, in Essex. They put a recumbent statue on her tomb and painted the finger-tips red, as a sign she died of poison."

"Oh, uncle John, is it true that people's finger-tips turn red when they are poisoned?" asked Jessie, deeply interested in this last detail.

("Are they never coming out!" thought Arnold Birkett, to whom the waiting had now become an absolute torture. "Am I never to see her?")

“Is it true?” said John Harbuckle. “Why, Jessie, you’re as bad as the children with the fairy tales! Never spoil a good tradition, child, by asking if it’s true! Always accept it in all its details.”

“Well, but I suppose I may ask—I may wonder, mayn’t I—whether she were so extraordinarily lovely after all?”

“A simple, round-faced country girl she looks in effigy, with her hood and wimple hiding all her hair. Now I hold, with St. Paul, that a woman’s hair is her glory,” said John Harbuckle.

“Oh, beauties are frauds!” said Alison. “Confess, uncle John, you never saw one!”

“Indeed, Alison, I can confess no such thing.”

“Oh, dear uncle John, that *is* good of you!” cried Jessie, with enthusiasm.

“When I was a young man, girls, all girls, used to seem to me most beautiful and wonderful creatures!” said the old bachelor.

“Oh, uncle John, how sad to think they’ve now grown common-place!” exclaimed Jessie, who was becoming more and more interested in this subject.

“Common-place! No Jessie! *Now*, I think girls, that is, *nice* girls—”

“Like Alison and me, for instance—”

"That is, nice girls," continued John Harbuckle, with a deepening smile, "are much more beautiful and much more wonderful!"

"Oh, but not *really*?" asked Jessie, with delight and wonder, and then she laughed.

Arnold Birkett heard her, for at the moment there was a lull in the shrill hooting of the street children.

"Good God! Her mother's laugh! Let me go—don't let me stop that happy laughter!" he felt; but he could not stir from the spot.

"I mean it, really, Jessie!" returned John Harbuckle,

"That is very charming! I'm so pleased!" said Jessie, the brightness of her smiling eyes dimming with a soft haze as she, with a slight blush, turned away from the others and gazed dreamily over the moat to the lights glowing in the dark embrasures of the bastion opposite.

"Am *I* beautiful and wonderful to Mac Carruthers, I wonder? Surely I can't be *really* beautiful!—I'm only pretty. But perhaps—perhaps!—Ah! It would be very nice if Mac were here! Poor Mac! I wonder—I wonder very much—I should like to know how much I would give if I could only know that Mac is really as fond of me as he says he is. Can

he think me really very beautiful and wonderful? Imagine anyone's thinking me wonderful! Perhaps Mac does!"

Arnold Birkett, standing without, saw a small street arab take up a stone and aim it at the summer-house; he could have stopped him but he did not.

That stone brought them all out. They looked up to the railings, but the rascal was gone. Arnold Birkett had stepped back a foot or two; they could not see him, a couple of day labourers hid him from them: but he, looking down, saw distinctly, and knew which was Jessie:

"Her mother! Her mother over again! Her mother—and *me!*"

His heart cried out to her to come to him. She never heard it.

She and her companions turned and went on their quiet way along the Tower Gardens.

He saw Jessie look up into John Harbuckle's face and smile, as she spoke words he himself could not hear. That, too, was hard to bear.

"It is my due, my punishment!" said the watcher. "I took away his Jessie from him; now he has mine!"

He followed along the upper path outside the rails; the others were many feet below.

He followed them until the sloping bank between them grew narrower.

Should he, having seen her, having known she was safe and happy, go back to Africa, leaving her in peace to cherish his memory as doubtless she now cherished it?

Would she be happier if she saw him? Should he bring her misery? Should he wait for John Harbuckle and tell him all? The impulse to make himself known balanced so evenly the impulse to slink away and hide himself for ever, what could he do? And yet he followed them, with his eyes never moving from Jessie.

The little group paused again for a few minutes just past the fragments of old London Wall that support a very common-place pump. It is exactly opposite Liquor Tea Warehouse, at the entrance to Postern Row; it marks the eastern boundary of the City. In old maps you may find a postern gate there: and beyond the open country.

The pump formed a screen for Arnold Birkett. He stopped and, looking on, saw, on a sudden, a little scene for which none of them was prepared.

A young man, in a brown tweed suit, sprang quickly across the road from the opposite path of Trinity Square, and, dashing past him,

halted a few feet further on, exactly opposite the little group Arnold Birkett was watching.

The young man caught hold of the railings and gave a whistle.

The sloping bank of the Tower Gardens was narrower at that point, it was but a few feet below the road.

Jessie turned round sharply. Arnold Birkett saw her face change—grow radiant. “Mac! Mac!” he heard her cry.

“Can’t I come to you? Where’s the gate?” exclaimed an eager voice, young and manly.

“Oh, Mac! How did you come? I can’t believe it’s you! How did you come?”

“I just came by the London and North Western,” returned Mac. “I say! I must get in! Where’s the gate? I’ve news!—news!—news!”

“Up there! up there! keep along by the railings. Uncle John, the key! I’m coming, Mac! Keep along by the railings! I’m coming!”

And Arnold Birkett, standing there, saw the young man hurrying along by the upper path and Jessie by the lower.

The path diverged. Mac and Jessie had to move at every step further apart before they could meet at that gate by the Dock House, near which John Harbuckle had heard the

voice of the man in the cab on the seventh of April.

Arnold Birkett watched them ; he saw John Harbuckle watching them too ; he saw Alison take her uncle's arm ; but the meeting of Mac and Jessie was hidden from him by the leafy trees.

Arnold Birkett saw Jessie no more that night.

John Harbuckle and Alison turned, arm in arm, towards the Devereux Tower ; Arnold Birkett slunk back again to Lambrooke.

## CHAPTER VI.

FROM THE DOVE'S TWILIGHT TO THE RAVEN'S.

"**N**O, no, Mac ! Come away from here, they'll stone us ! they will indeed !" were Jessie's first words, when she had opened the gate of the Tower Gardens to Mac, who at once tried to seize both her hands and would doubtless have kissed her, had she allowed him to do so.

It was the gate by the docks, opposite the Royal Mint, where a guard of soldiers was on duty.

"Stone us ! What do you mean ?" asked Mac, immediately suppressing all signs of affection, and walking on quickly by Jessie's side.

"I saw them do it the other evening," said Jessie, nervously. "You don't know what the people about here are like ! If they see a decently dressed man and woman talking ever so quietly together in these gardens they'll stone them ! It enrages them so ! Here—here's a little path where they can't see us ! We shall

be safe here. Oh Mac!—oh Mac!—you've frightened me a little! Don't you think you should have sent a telegram if you couldn't write? There's an arbour at the end of this walk."

"Darling!—how you're trembling! Take my arm! I've done wrong—forgive me—I wanted to tell you the good news myself, I was jealous even of the wires! Jessie! you *are* all right again now, aren't you?" said Mac, with a curious mixture of anxiety and delight in his tone, as he placed her hand more firmly on his arm.

"Yes, yes! It was only for a moment! I'm all right, and so glad!" said Jessie, in a more natural voice. "I was frightened, Mac; a few days ago aunt and I were frightened, and—I'm so silly, I haven't quite got over it. Your note this morning was so miserable. Nothing told me you were coming, and yet I've been thinking of you all day."

"You have? Bless you for it! I didn't myself know I was coming until this morning. Then I felt I must be my own messenger, I couldn't let anything else tell you. Jessie—I've got an appointment! At last I've got something to do."

"Mac!"

Mac felt that after all he had been right in

telling her himself. He was sure that as long as memory lasted he should never forget her face, her voice, as she uttered that one short word, it was to last for ever.

“Jessie!—it’s true, darling!”

Then he could not for a moment speak another syllable; neither could she.

They took a few steps in silence.

“What is it?” presently Jessie asked, as if it were, as indeed it was to them, a very solemn question.

“It’s Alec’s doing. Alec has been blowing my trumpet all round Birrendale; and at last to good—I hope to good—effect. But it’s a rather complicated affair; the whole thing I mean. Oh, Jessie, if you only knew how many thousands of years it seems since we parted at that wretched station! If you only knew the blackness, the darkness, the blank emptiness of everything after you were gone!”

“I do know a little,” put in Jessie, with a sigh that had as much of pleasure as of pain in it. “You haven’t been here, you know!” she added, quaintly.

“And the misery of waiting and waiting, and asking and begging for work, and getting nothing, and feeling as if the world didn’t want you and wouldn’t let you live—Oh, it’s horrible! horrible! Thank God, it’s over now!”

“But you’re not telling me what it is, dear ! About the appointment ? Poor Mac, your letter this morning almost made me cry, it did indeed !”

“ You sweet child ! But I didn’t know then—not when I wrote yesterday ; I only knew last night—after post time.”

“ Can’t you tell me in three words ? ” said Jessie, impatiently.

“ You remember to have heard of Donaldson of Langdyke ; I’m to be his secretary,” said Mac, hurriedly.

Jessie, whose fancy during the last few minutes had been soaring mightily, felt rather disappointed. In spite of Mac’s excitement, the news when it came fell flat ; and Mac knew that it did.

“ Secretary ! That isn’t much, is it ? ” asked Jessie.

“ Well, perhaps not in an ordinary way ! ” said Mac, slightly hurt ; “ but there are circumstances that make this a first-rate opening. You see what a young man really wants is an opening ; and heaven knows how difficult it is for him to get one ! Especially when he has no father to push him on—and when he’s failed in his ‘ exams,’ as I have. Alec and I think it’s a splendid opening. My uncle does too, I know, and that’s the reason he doesn’t

like it. This morning, he gave both of us rather more of his mind than we cared to have. I'm not sorry I'm leaving Muirhead, I can tell you. I've had enough of it lately; rather more than enough."

"He doesn't like me: I feel sure he doesn't," said Jessie. "Poor Mac!"

"Poor Mac! not at all!—as if you weren't worth more to me than all, and everybody! I have, however, had a good deal to put up with. Don't let's talk about it!—what does it amount to? But as for Alec, words won't express how good he's been; he has worked for me and no mistake."

Now there was a little circumstance that Mac felt he could not quite honourably discuss with Jessie, and Mac was before all things honourable. It was the reason why Mac's uncle was not so particularly well pleased with him just then. There were indeed two reasons. He begrimed Mac his robust health every time he saw him and Alec together; he did not approve of his impecunious nephew getting engaged to Jessie Bayliss, who had not a farthing, when Mac knew very well that for the asking he might have had the hand of a very charming girl who owned a pleasant estate, not a dozen miles from Muirhead, for the improvement and management of which

Mac seemed to his uncle cut out by nature. And the young heiress—pretty she was too, only Mac persisted in not seeing her beauty—the young heiress had shown signs of a distinct liking for Mac.

It was greatly to Mac's credit that he did not boast of this; but Mac really possessed a deal of proper feeling.

"Alec has worked for me, and no mistake," said Mac. "You remember the Dryfesdales, Jessie? Well, Donaldson of Langdyke is staying with them just now. He came over to Muirhead to dinner with them a few days ago. I was at the Johnstones, fortunately; and Alec and he got talking about one thing and another, and as usual my trumpet was blown tremendously. The consequence was he—Donaldson, I mean—rode over yesterday and settled the matter. I shall have to go back to-morrow. He's very anxious to have me with him at once."

"I'm afraid you won't like it," sighed Jessie.

"Liking has nothing to do with the matter," returned Mac; "I can put my likings in my pocket now I have you to work for. But I rather think I shan't dislike it——"

"Is he young or old?" interrupted Jessie.

"About my own age," said Mac. "Rather older, perhaps."

"And nice?" asked Jessie.

"'Nice,' what a term for a man! He was very considerate and afraid of hurting my feelings, when we had our little talk and settled matters. I, at least, felt so, and was grateful; but Alec, who is sharper than I, put another construction upon his manner when I told him of it."

"I should like to know what it was! What was it?"

"Alec said it was his own feelings not mine he was so tender about. 'What he needs,' said Alec, who really is most uncommonly shrewd sometimes, 'what he needs is not a secretary but a master, that's his only chance. I saw him look strange when I told him you'd saved my life. He has an hereditary failing—he's not a teetotaler; but he has just sense enough to know his danger. I'm sure he recognized you as his master as soon as he saw you. The fact is'—this is what Alec told me—'I put the notion into his head; and there's nothing like putting an idea into a man's head if you want to find it there!' That's what Alec said. Between ourselves, Jessie, I really had wondered at the liberality of his offer, but of course I saw it all at once then; and a most delightful feeling of power came over me. I don't know how it is," Mac went on, his matter of

fact narrative breaking down suddenly, “I don’t know how it is, but ever since that day we drove together through the Dale to Allarbie—you and I, Jessie—(can we possibly be the same two?—we can’t be!—and yet we must be)—ever since that day, I’ve felt a different being; I’ve felt as if I had new powers—I can’t make it plain—I’m not a metaphysician—I only know I look back upon my old self, my self that used to be before that wonderful—”

“Wonderful?” echoed Jessie, dreamily, remembering John Harbuckle’s remarks, and the thoughts they had awakened.

“Aye! wonderful!” and then came wild, half incoherent words from Mac, and strange happy answers from Jessie.

They sat in a rustic arbour, screened from the road by elder-bushes. An arbour as rustic as if the ebbing tide of the great City’s traffic were not sounding all around them, as like the noise of the Birren on a calm evening as could be. The brick tower at the north-east angle of the wall, in which Raleigh had shivered through the bitter winters, looked down upon them; all was unheeded—they only knew they were together—and together looking forward to a long bright future to be spent together. Together! Always they

were to be together ; always that refrain they had heard on the road through Birrendale to Allarbie was to go with them through the longer road of life. “ Together, for ever ; For ever, together.” Why should the simple presence of a person who to everyone else is a very common-place mortal, make two hearts so very glad ?

Well—so it is ! so it is ! so it has been—so it ever will be. They were happier now than when they used to play together at Cauldknowe. They discussed their plans ; their future grew to their minds so one, so intimately united, to look forward to it was delight. The flaming gold died out of the windows of the western front ; the damson bloom deepened on the roofs of the four tall turrets, the crowns and pennants were hardly seen ; the first twilight, that crepusculum of the day, the Jews in elder times called “ the dove’s-twilight,” grew quiet and sombre. One by one the dove’s feathers were changing by imperceptible gradation, while the lights came out here and there in the great fortress.

John Harbuckle and Alison had first been sitting in the summer house opposite the Devereux Tower. They had, of course, talked a little of Mac and Jessie. Then they had drifted—as was natural to both of them—into

antiquities. There were a heap of stones that had formed part of the old wall ; they spent a good deal of time in examining them. At last Alison suggested that it was time to look after Jessie.

So they went along the path for a while until it was met by another which descended from the gate opposite the Mint.

At the foot of that path John Harbuckle paused.

"It was over there—on that long walk overshadowed by the dock warehouse—that I first met your uncle Arthur—Jessie's father ;" remarked the old bachelor, pointing in the direction he mentioned. "It is rather a curious coincidence, but that path—as you may have noticed—ends in a little wilderness, and in that wilderness there is a grave."

"I have noticed it," said Alison.

"Few things escape you, my dear, you have an observer's eye. We shall be—indeed, I feel you are, a most admirable companion to me, Alie."

"I'm so glad," said Alison ; then more seriously she added, "yes, I noticed the grave—but—" hesitating a little—"it has just occurred to me that uncle Arthur must have been coming *away from it* on that evening."

"True ! I never thought of that before.

But these things mean nothing you know. I think we must be going in."

They went up the ascending path to the little walk screened by shrubs and so to the rustic arbour ; there they found Mac and Jessie were preparing to return, so they all strolled back together to the house in Trinity Square.

"Don't you think, Jessie," said Mac, as they went along, "don't you think I ought to speak to Mr. Harbuckle ? I suppose I am not exactly obliged to do so, but it seems the right thing to do."

Jessie assenting, Mac presently found himself in the dining-room with John Harbuckle.

"If things still promise well at the end of six months, might they venture then ?" asked Mac, when he had given a little account of his prospects.

"Precarious ! Very precarious !" said John Harbuckle ; but immediately began devising liberal things.

"I won't allow myself to think it's precarious," said Mac ; "I am sanguine of success. Since Jessie has told me she cares for me a little, I feel—I feel—I don't know how to put it—a sort of grasp," working his fingers rapidly, "a sort of fate-compelling grasp !"

"Yes—yes," said John Harbuckle, slowly, and with a long pause between the words ;

"so I felt once myself. It is right you should feel so, quite right ! But your new patient will require a stronger hand than yours. I've known a good many such cases in my time ; it is only the pierced Hand with the print of the nails in it that is strong enough to control such a one."

"I know," said Mac, gravely.

"Well, I don't suppose we shall quarrel," said John Harbuckle. "I'll do my best for Jessie's happiness and for yours too."

"They're identical—they can't be separated," said Mac.

"Of course not : I don't wish to separate them," said John Harbuckle. "She's a dear girl ; the house will seem rather desolate again without her ; but as we must lose her I don't know that we can do better than give her up to the man of her own choice, provided—of course, that——"

"That he can keep her," said Mac. "I think I'm too fond of her to wish to—that is, I won't be rash ;—I mean, we both intend to be very prudent."

"Then you have my very best wishes," said John Harbuckle.

"Thank you very much. It's—I'm afraid it's getting late. I must be going directly—if I might speak to her for one minute more?"

and without waiting for an answer, Mac went in search of Jessie, who, as it happened, was not very far off.

The “one minute” contained a great many more than sixty seconds ; but Mac was returning to Scotland the next morning, so it was very excusable ; and of course he had to give some time to Mrs. Bayliss.

After Mac had left him, John Harbuckle stood for some time looking out of the window. The dove’s twilight had all gone, the raven’s was fast darkening into a summer night.

John Harbuckle stood at the window of that dear room which had always been his nest, musing over the strange fate that had given him the right to speak to Jessie’s lover as he had done; to act a father’s part to the daughter of Arthur Bayliss and the Jessie of Catherine Court.

There was a gentle pleasure in his heart as he stood there thinking over it all.

He liked to look after Jessie and her interests. He looked out on the raven’s twilight and was calmly happy ; yet he sighed. He was very fond of Jessie.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE TOWER SUBWAY.

IT might have been perhaps a fortnight after Mac's flying visit that one afternoon, as John Harbuckle was leaving his office for the day, no less a person than Mr. Robbins appeared at the hall door, half of which door was already closed.

Mr. Robbins took off his hat; it had once been John Harbuckle's.

"Good day, Robbins," said his late master; "how are you?"

"Very well, thank you, sir; hope you are the same."

"Yes, I am very well just now. And your wife?"

"Fust-rate, sir."

"Ah! I'm glad to hear it. She is now, I suppose, exercising her talent solely on your behalf? Do you want to speak to me about anything special?"

"Why, yes, sir! A little matter of business, if you wouldn't mind."

"Come into the office, then. Well, what is it?" said John Harbuckle, half fearing an application for a small loan.

"The fact is, Mr. Harbuckle, my knowledge of the harts, isn't, as you may say——"

"You've made a mistake or two in your purchases? We've all done that, you know, in our time."

"It's a drawback, when your funds is limited, sir, as I found."

"Just so," remarked Mr. Harbuckle, feeling the application for the loan coming near. "I warned you that it was a hazardous attempt."

"Yes, sir; but 'once bit, twice shy,' says I. So I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind helping me with a little——"

"Give it up at once, Robbins. Give it up!"

"Oh, it wasn't about money, sir," continued Robbins, in a more lively strain. "But, you know, my brother William, he and his wife, they're care-takers of a house in Fenchurch Avenue, one of that big new block—and a fine thing, too, it is for them; and if you should hear of something similar, me and Mrs. Robbins would be obliged to you for thinking of us; for we're not doing much in the second-'and line. But, as I was saying, this brother of mine, sir, have got a party in his 'ouse that's

taken the top floor, which is what not many people care for, because of the up and down, and the heighth ; but, as I was saying, this party've took the top floor, and I don't blame him neither—fust-rate rooms, and air like the sea-side. And says I to my brother William, when he told me, ‘Jim,’ says I, for we always call him ‘Jim,’ it’s a way we’ve got into ; ‘Jim,’ says I, ‘you be on to that party about antike furniture ; Queen Annie, Loo Cartorse, and cetera,’ says I. ‘There’s money in that party, d’ye see, and I’m equal to a good commission.’ So my brother William he goes at the party, and bless you, he works him beautiful ! Be-eautiful, sir !” And Mr. Robbins’s face glowed with appreciative delight and fraternal pride.

“Talked to him, sir,” he went on, “about how things was all changed now, different from what they used to was in the days the party remembered, for he’s been for years in foring parts, and it appears don’t know nothing of ’igh art and such like—so he talks to him, does my brother William, all about the vulgarity in these days of buying furniture out of shops, and what bargains you can get second— and if you only know where, and all that ; in fact, sir, he just showed him the way he should go—like a father, sir. Oh, it

was beautiful!—be-eautiful, the way he took him in, and——!”

The loan having retired into a dim future, Mr. Harbuckle fully entered into the spirit of Mr. Robbins's narrative and smiled a most encouraging and sympathetic smile.

“But now, sir, here's the rub ! We must go straight with that party, mustn't we, sir ?”

“Certainly, Robbins ! Most decidedly !” said Mr. Harbuckle, with energy.

“The very words I knew you'd say, sir ! And right he shall be, if I can keep him so ! What I've come to you about, Mr. Harbuckle, is to make sure that whatever he gets from me it's the genuine article, and I'm blest if I always know one from t'other myself ! But no duffers for him, sir !—it won't do ! It'ud be dead against my own interests !” said the ingenuous Robbins.

“Very true ! Very true ! Then you want to show me something ?”

“If you wouldn't mind, sir.”

“Where is it to be seen ?—at your place ?”

“No, sir, it's across the water. In one of the streets behind Pickle-Herring Wharf. If you could oblige me with your opinion this evening, sir——”

“This evening ? Let me see—this evening ?” said John Harbuckle, as if trying to

remember what previous engagement he had made. "And what is it I'm to look at?"

"A sideboard, sir."

"Of what period?"

"That's where I lose myself, sir!" said Robbins, shaking his head. "It's like that one we did up for young Mr. Jackson when he was going to be married."

"Is it? Then I'll go over this evening after dinner. What do they want for it?"

"A song! sir; party as 'as it's been better off, but's rejuced; wants to part with it on the quiet."

"Pickle-Herring Wharf! Is there time to get over there before dinner, I wonder?"

"Why, bless you, sir, 'twouldn't take you no time to get there by the Subway!"

"To be sure! I never thought of that. All right, then, Robbins, I'll go over at once."

"Thank you, sir, very much obliged. Then I'll call again in an hour?"

"Yes, I'll be in by that time."

"Thank you, sir," and Mr. Robbins moved to the door of the office after he had given him the address.

"Robbins," said John Harbuckle, slightly raising his voice, "I think I'll send you a card. You'll get it first thing in the morning."

“ Well, sir,” acquiesced Robbins, with evident reluctance—

“ Yes, I’ll send you a card ! ” repeated John Harbuckle.

“ Very well, sir, and thank you ! Good evening, sir,” and he departed.

“ Pore old chap ! Well I’m blest ! ‘As it come to this already ? ” he soliloquized, on his way along Trinity Square.

But householders may not perhaps think too harshly of Mrs. Bayliss’s known objections to the visits of old servants, neither may they think her brother foolishly weak for taking these objections into consideration. It was one thing for John Harbuckle to see Mr. Robbins in the office, and quite another to allow him to call after business hours. This was a nice distinction that Mr. Robbins saw but did not appreciate.

“ It is always as well to avoid domestic complications, if possible,” said John Harbuckle to himself ; and he sighed a gentle, regretful sigh, as he felt that he could thoroughly have enjoyed a good rummage in his den with Robbins, with Robbins who knew his little ways so well.

“ One cannot have everything,” he continued, as he left his home and turned towards the river. “ And the girls are a great com-

fort to me. I almost wonder how I could have lived and been—well—yes—in a way—happy—certainly comfortable, without them. By-the-bye, I might have asked Alison to come with me now. She would have liked it. Shall I return for her? No—perhaps not. Mary would say, with much justice—although she's never been there herself—that the Tower Subway isn't a nice place for her Alison to go through, even with me."

Occupied with such-like reflections, he came, nearly opposite the gate of the Tower Gardens, to a sort of kiosk, the roof of which covered the top of a spiral staircase, a shabby, much-used, corkscrew-looking affair, by which he wound down and down, until he was many feet below the level of the Thames.

It was about the time when the dwellers on the Surrey side, who work all day in the City return to their homes. Among these are a number of young men and women, many of whom belong to a class popularly known as "'Arry and 'Arry's young woman." Their day's work being over, these young persons, whose vivacity is irrepressible, happily for them, clatter down that cork-screw, which magnifies the slightest sound, with a stamping and a shouting, and a comic song singing, and a shrill screeching, and a farm-yard imitationing,

and a whistling, and a war-whooping, and Aye Billie-ing! and a Ge-e-or-gie-ing! and a giggling, and a laughing, and a joking, and a shrieking, and a trampling and a pounding of feet, and a general effect as of a “jolly bank holiday gone mad.”

H's are, it would seem, charged extra in the Tower Subway, so are left on the City side.

Can you imagine 'Ampstead 'Eath on a fine Whit-Monday? Can you imagine the sounds of that 'Ampstead 'Eath collected and enlarged? If so you may form some faint idea of the noises that deafened John Harbuckle as he laid down his half-penny on the toll-table at the cork-screw's base. Before him a long tube, like a drain pipe, lighted here and there with jets of gas, stretched away into a dim and apparently endless distance. Through this tube ran a foot-path so narrow that only one passenger at a time could tread it. This path ran between two low banks, such as are, or were some time since, to be seen in the cabins of penny steam-boats, and on to one of these banks a passenger coming from the opposite end must needs mount if he wished to pass the occupier of the path.

Along this path John Harbuckle went at his usual deliberate pace, the shrieking of the sportive young persons pursuing him, like

sounds heard in delirium ; the odours—but here I refrain, the fine strong Saxon word for which I have substituted the mild euphemism, “odours,” would inadequately represent the fragrance of the Tower Subway :

“ *Ce n’était ambre ; ce n’était fleur.*”

“ Of course it is very wonderful that I should be walking underneath the Thames,” said the refined old bachelor, as he plodded on in the immediate wake of a gentleman who, having either taken much more than was good for him, or being affected by the heat of the day and the peculiarities of the subfluvial passage, was lurching unpleasantly. “ Modern science is a glorious thing, I’m very fond of it ; but I think I’ll go and look at St. Saviour’s presently, and return home by the bridge.”

At length, and not before he was tired of the tube, he arrived at another cork-screw, where there was more ’Arry and ’Arriet, and where he found it necessary to assist the gentleman who still preceded him.

The open air was indeed delicious after this little trip through the infernal regions.

He walked for a few minutes among the wharves.

“ That’s fine ! That’s worth coming to see ! ” he presently exclaimed. “ I’ll point that out to

young Woolcomb. I never noticed that before! Very fine!"

These remarks were called forth by an opening between the enormously high warehouse walls, a mere slit in their darkness, but revealing and framing a most charming little upright picture of river, shipping, and opposite shore.

"Yes, young Woolcomb should come over here! By the way, young Woolcomb's a nice fellow! I should think Alison would be interested in young Woolcomb, I'll ask his father to bring him some day."

(Oh wicked John Harbuckle! and here I may as well say, as I do not wish to have to refer again to the subject, that old Woolcomb did one day bring young Woolcomb to the house on Tower Hill, and that Alison found old Woolcomb a much more interesting companion than his son; which was unfortunate, perhaps, as there happened to be a Mrs. Woolcomb already, a chronic invalid, certainly, but who was likely to see them all out; not I suppose, that that made the slightest difference to Alison, who never thought of these sort of things as applying in any way to herself; but, as she remarked to Jessie after that visit, it only proved that a man can't possibly be an interesting companion until he is at

least forty, after which age he goes on progressing rapidly, if he is of the progressive order; which is not invariably the case.)

But to return to our bachelor.

He found the house, the sideboard, and its "rejuiced" owner, who, by-the-bye, was slightly flavoured with rum; and then turned his steps towards St. Saviour's, at the foot of London Bridge; remarking, as he did so, that the sideboard, though genuine, was not a good example of its style.

Then a neighbouring church clock struck.

"It's later than I thought; I must, I'm afraid, return by that dreadful Subway, there's no time for the bridge;" said John Harbuckle.

So again, and with great reluctance, he descended the cork-screw, paid another half-penny, and re-entered the tube.

The shrieking, tramping, and pounding was going on as deliriously as before.

He walked on along the narrow path, coming gradually up to a gas-jet, passing it, going into semi-darkness, approaching the light again, again going out into the hideous gloom.

Figures of passengers, now and then, loomed out from the distance, came nearer, passed a jet, mounted the ridge of the iron tube beside him, and were lost.

It had a singularly weird effect.

John Harbuckle noticed it; noticed it several times.

When he was more than half through the Subway and had just passed a gas-light he observed, just coming into sight, the figure of a tall man of an altogether different type from any he had yet met.

In the Tower Subway a tall man is obliged to take off his hat. This man had taken off *his* hat.

John Harbuckle and the tall man advanced towards the next gas-jet from opposite directions.

By the light of that jet they saw each other distinctly.

They met—within a foot or so.

Then the man with his hat in his hand stepped aside on to the ridge to John Harbuckle's left and passed on.

John Harbuckle turned, for him, sharply. The tall man who carried his hat in his hand was already vanishing into the dimness.

John Harbuckle followed him.

The man's steps were longer and quicker than his; John Harbuckle hurried after him.

By the next jet the man stopped, turned, and waited for him.

The old bachelor went up to him and

laying his hand firmly on the other's arm, said, with a quiet arresting decision in which was no shade of doubt :

“ Arthur Bayliss ! ”

“ John Harbuckle ! ” returned the man ; and his voice was the voice the old bachelor had heard and recognized that night he had mused so long and earnestly in the Tower Gardens.

## CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

“ARTHUR BAYLISS !”  
“John Harbuckle.”

But there was neither surprise nor alarm in either voice, nor in the eyes of either of the men as they looked each other steadily in the face by the light of the flaring gas-jet in the uncouth Tower Subway.

“How long have you come back from the dead ?” asked John Harbuckle, with his usual slow and distinct utterance.

“I returned to London early in April,” said Arthur Bayliss. “We can’t talk in this hole. Are you going to Tower Hill? I will go with you.”

Without another word they went on through the narrow Subway. There was only room for one passenger, Arthur Bayliss therefore went on first, John Harbuckle following close behind, as if he had him in charge.

The whole scene was weird, strange, and unreal to both of them. The magnified sounds were more hideous than ever.

They both paused at the top of the corkscrew stairs, and were again in the fresh air and on Tower Hill.

"They are with you?" said Arthur Bayliss.

"Mary and the girls?—yes. How do you know?" said John Harbuckle, with hesitation. He was debating with himself whether he should ask Bayliss home or not.

"I saw you with them," returned Bayliss, abruptly. Conversation was difficult between these two men.

"You returned in April. Why did you not come to me?" asked John Harbuckle, after an awkward pause.

"It was not an easy thing to do," said Bayliss.

John Harbuckle looked keenly at Bayliss.

He had eyes that saw as well as looked; distinctly the eyes of an observer, deep-set, and penetrating.

There was Bayliss, still handsome, well-dressed, and apparently prosperous, and yet he had found it difficult to call upon his friends.

John Harbuckle thought he would not ask him home just yet.

From the entrance of the Subway to the gate opposite the bonded warehouses is but a few yards.

"We can't talk here; shall we go in there?" said John Harbuckle, pointing to the gardens.

Bayliss hesitated for a moment.

"As you will," he said, as if sternly assenting to the inevitable.

The two men crossed the road side by side. John Harbuckle unlocked the gate--they went in. The gardens were then quite deserted. The children and their maids were gone; the few people who stroll there of an evening had not yet come.

They had the place to themselves.

"You were not surprised to see me," said Arthur Bayliss, making a definite assertion.

"I was not," said John Harbuckle. They were then standing still on the gravel path beside the coping of the moat.

Speech did not come readily to either of the men at that time.

Bayliss was the first to speak.

"You were not unprepared to see me?"

"I was not."

It seemed they could get no further than these short questions and shorter answers. There was a dead pause before John Harbuckle added: "I had already heard your voice and recognized it. It must have been the night you arrived that I heard it. It was over there by the Mint."

"I landed at St. Katherine's docks. It was about ten at night."

"That was the time. The bugles had just sounded."

Then there was another pause.

They moved on a few steps.

"It was a melancholy return," said Bayliss, after a while.

"Where did you come from?" asked John Harbuckle, in a tone of judicial inquiry.

"From the West Coast of Africa, *via* Lisbon," said Bayliss.

"You were, then, one of the few survivors of the wreck of the 'Mellicurrie?'" asked Harbuckle.

"I was never on board the 'Mellicurrie.'"

"Never? Who then was the Arthur Bayliss who went down in her?" asked Harbuckle, with both surprise and suspicion.

"Heaven knows; I don't. It was not I!" said Bayliss.

"But the Liverpool address in the *Times*? It was your address."

"Then it was a mistake," said Bayliss.

"A mistake! A mistake that killed your wife! She wore widows' weeds for you, Arthur Bayliss! Such mistakes should not occur!"

And John Harbuckle's usually calm tones

trembled and rose with an indignation he could not control.

“They should not,” said Bayliss. “The bitterest pain in all my bitter life is the knowledge that that mistake occurred.—My Jessie is with you. I saw you here with her a few days since.”

“You must have a good memory!” said John Harbuckle, grimly.

“Not a better one than yours appears to be,” said Bayliss.

Again they paused and walked on.

“Before we speak of Jessie, I should like to know the cause of your long absence and silence,” said John Harbuckle.

“Harbuckle,” said Bayliss, with evident pain and difficulty, “once, at a crisis in my life, I took a terribly false step—I turned aside when I should have gone straight on.”

“You evaded your creditors?”

“Am I obliged to tell you all?” asked Bayliss, speaking with still deeper pain and difficulty.

“I never force a confidence,” said Harbuckle; “but something is due to me under the circumstances.”

“The truth is my health is so shattered that it is all but impossible for me to dwell on some subjects,” said Bayliss, hurriedly; then

more calmly he went on, “I have stayed out of England until the Statute of Limitation has paid all my debts. I am in business again now; I may some day be able to make things square. I hope so; I am doing better than I had any right to anticipate. Let us bury the past and start anew.”

He held out his hand as he spoke.

John Harbuckle hesitated.

Jessie’s mother, as he had last seen her, stood in his imagination between him and that outstretched hand. Then he told himself that after all she was Arthur Bayliss’s wife and not his, that he had no right even to protect her against her husband; that she was at peace now; that she would wish him and that other man to be friends.

“Bayliss,” he said, trying hard to speak calmly, but failing, “there is and there always must be *one* between us. I saw her not long before she died; I can never forget how she looked. She is in heaven now. God forgive you if you wronged her!” He held out his hand, Bayliss shook it; and they walked along side by side in silence.

“And Jessie?” presently asked Bayliss.

“She is with us. She is the light of our household. She makes life pleasant to all of us. She has—they have not been with me

long ; only long enough for me to grow—for me to see how bright she makes my sombre old home.”

“ My brother James took care of her, I suppose ? ”

“ Yes, she has been well cared for always, poor child ! ”

“ I felt he would—I felt you all would, or—I suppose I should have acted differently. James, I saw by the papers, came in for a considerable legacy, which would have been mine, had the old man who left it him known I was living. It went the way of all poor James’s money ? ”

“ Yes, Mary and her daughter have nothing but their wretched little pensions, and, with a good deal of difficulty, I’ve managed to save the Scotch place ; that brings them in a trifle. I hardly like to say it, but, as far as we can see, poor James died just in time to save them from absolute ruin. Of course I could do nothing while he was alive.”

“ Of course not ; I lost a good deal by him myself, at various times. I should like to see Jessie.”

“ Jessie is excessively nervous, she is of a peculiarly sensitive organization ; it will not do to be too sudden with this news, I could not answer for the result. I will go home,

and endeavour to prepare her mind a little, and then, perhaps——”

“I’ll wait here; you’ll be as quick as you can?”

“I will.”

They walked in silence back towards the gate.

No two men could have looked more dissimilar. As they went side by side along the straight path above the moat, they offered a very striking contrast.

John Harbuckle was aware of it, aware then, as he had always been, that the tall, handsome man, with the long eye-lashes, and expressive eyes, had most decidedly the advantage over him in point of appearance; for he himself had never quite attained even the medium height, and now he stooped habitually. His scanty locks, too, were quite grey, while Bayliss possessed thick hair, that showed still some of the original brown.

The fact was, John Harbuckle was some years older than his rival. As he walked slowly along by that rival’s side, he felt again as he had often felt before, that he never had a chance after Arthur Bayliss had come upon the stage.

It was in that very place, twenty-four years ago, that he and Bayliss had first met.

It was on just such an evening. The trees had grown a good deal since then; the garden was greener and fuller now, but all else looked much the same. He recalled it vividly, and so did Bayliss; although neither spoke of it, it seemed to each as if the other were remembering it.

John Harbuckle and his Jessie of Catherine Court had been sitting under the acacias nearly opposite the Beauchamp Tower. They had been engaged for some time. John Harbuckle was elder than she by ten years. They had been friends as long as she could recollect; he had always loved her, and she had been content that he loved her.

They were going to be married in a couple of months; they had been talking about where they should live; they both felt calmly happy, very contented, very secure.

James Bayliss and Mary Harbuckle had been walking up and down the long, straight path on the east side of the gardens, while John and his Jessie had been talking under the acacias.

Presently Jessie thought of something she had forgotten to say to Mary. It seemed to her of importance.

“Let us go and look for them,” she said, rising at once. She was always rather impetuous.

"Oh, not yet! Let us wait!" John had said, for he had been very happy, and was reluctant to break up the quiet talk.

But she would go at once; so he went with her. They walked past the Beauchamp Tower and the new Barracks, and so on to the long path above the little kitchen gardens down in the moat, among which a soldier and his lass were strolling amorously, just as another soldier and lass were doing now, and where the great dock wall was frowning down on the path, just as now, and there they saw Mary Harbuckle and James, and, for the first time, *James's brother*.

The three saw them and walked leisurely to meet the two.

"That must be Arthur Bayliss with them. He has just come then! They were expecting him," said John Harbuckle's Jessie.

When they came near, John Harbuckle noticed that Arthur Bayliss was a very handsome young man. They were all young in those days.

It was not very long after that, that John Harbuckle had thought of hanging himself on the old lamp-rod in Catherine Court which faced the house where his lost Jessie used to live.

It seemed to both those men, as they walked

side by side in those same gardens, as if it had all happened only yesterday, instead of four-and-twenty years ago. It all stood between them still.

At the gate they parted for the time; Arthur Bayliss turned again to the path above the moat, John Harbuckle towards his house in Trinity Square.

He went up that fatal hill, which so many a brave man has faced on his way to the block and axe, with a very grave countenance and a heavy heart.

“I bear him no grudge, I hope, for that,” he said to himself. “I hope I do not. It was but natural, I suppose, that she should have preferred him ; and they were both frank and honest, they hid nothing, they told me all ; it was natural, I suppose. I ought not to bear him malice for it, and—I hope I don’t. But—I can’t forgive him for killing her ! He did kill her ; how, I don’t know, but he did it ! I’ve shaken hands with him. I mean the past shall be the past ; but her face, as I last saw it, haunts me, and haunt me it always will. *He* never saw it as I saw it. But doubtless he’s been punished enough. It is not for me to add to his punishment, and, God helping me, I will not. It will be hard to give him up his Jessie ; it has been a great

pleasure to me to see her mother's daughter about the old house. She is a dear girl—a very dear girl."

And John Harbuckle touched his eyes for a moment with his right hand fore-finger.

Now while John Harbuckle and Arthur Bayliss had been in the Tower Gardens the little household in Trinity Square were wondering what could have become of him.

He was usually very punctual ; such a thing as for him to keep the dinner waiting a whole half-hour was, previous to this evening, unknown.

Mrs. Robbins's successor, whose affections were with the military, and who was anxious for her "evening out," sent up heart-rending accounts of the state of the fish ; but still the master came not.

Mrs. Bayliss began to grow seriously anxious, looked out of the window and as far as she could see, and at last gave the word of command to serve in five minutes.

"What can have become of uncle John?" they all said.

"I thought he'd have taken me down Thames Street to show me the site of Castle Baynard," said Alison, aloud, adding to herself (for she feared to appear pedantic), "I

looked up that story he told us, in the Guildhall Library to-day, and I've found several fresh items for him."

As for Jessie, she was already discussing privately whether *the* dress should be white satin or white silk, and wondering what Mac was doing at Muirhead, and whether there would be a note for her to-morrow morning.

The girls were sitting in opposite corners of one of the window seats of the drawing-room. They were both wearing soft grey dresses with much lace around their throats and wrists. They made, together with the lace curtains and the bright flowers in the painted boxes, a very pretty picture; they looked so soft and gentle, sitting there together; for although in common arithmetic one and one make two, two girls, who harmonise well, seem to be, when together, of more value than they are as two separate items; therefore, it strikes me that one and one, as in this instance, may sometimes make more, and sometimes perhaps less than two. You see you can't *group* one girl.

Mrs. Bayliss looked at her girls with a calm pleasure. Mrs. Bayliss's temper had been very good that day; the want of continual friction was slowly improving it. As she saw her girls sitting there together, she thought that

two girls were most decidedly prettier than one.

“But”—hearing the clock strike—“dear, dear, dear me!” she cried, “what can have become of uncle John? Look out of the window, Alison.”

“Ah! here he is, at last!” said Alison. “Creeping along as if he had the whole day before him. Oh, you naughty uncle John! Mother, how very grave he’s looking!” she added this last remark as John Harbuckle came nearer.

“It’s been a hot, tiring day,” said Mrs. Bayliss; “I wonder he didn’t come in rather earlier than later on such a day.”

A minute or two afterwards they heard his slow step on the stairs. Mary went out to him.

“Why, John, how late!” she began.

“Mary, I want to speak to you,” he interrupted, in a voice that at once compelled attention and awakened anxiety.

“Yes,” she said, scanning his face eagerly.

“Come up to my den,” he said. “The girls are in the drawing-room, I suppose.”

They went up to one of the top rooms, which was crowded in a way that scarcely allowed space for two chairs.

“Sit down,” he said, getting a chair out of

a corner, and then, taking his own, which was by an open desk :

“ You remember the conversation we had the other night about Arthur Bayliss ? ” he began at once.

“ Distinctly , ” said Mary, with a quick glance at her brother.

“ And the face in the crowd ? ” asked John.

“ The more I think of it, the more it recalls him to me , ” said Mary. “ You have seen it somewhere else ? ”

“ I have . ”

“ Good Heavens, John ! Is it possible he can be alive ? ”

“ He is. I have seen him . ”

“ Seen him ! Where ? ”

“ We met in the Tower Subway . ”

“ John ! you don’t mean it ? I can’t believe it ! ”

“ It’s true, though. We have spoken . ”

“ And did he recognise you, John ? I can’t believe it ! ”

“ At once, but then anyone might recognise me here . ”

“ And—and—how was he looking ? ” asked Mary, a thrill of pleasure stealing in among her surprise.

“ Prosperous as to money matters ; he’s wretched enough, I fancy, in all else . ”

"My James's brother! Where is he?—where is he, John?" the delight gaining on the surprise.

"I left him in the Tower Gardens. He has stopped out of England until Time has paid his debts, and now he's come back. He wants to see Jessie."

"Of course, of course! He must see her at once, let's call the poor darling! How delighted she'll be!—she was always so fond of him. Let me go and fetch her. Or—I suppose we mustn't tell her too suddenly—what shall we do? I'm so glad, John! I *am* so glad! Ah, if Jessie's poor mother had been alive! But, John, what's he been doing with himself, and why didn't he let us know?—why didn't he let *her* know? Why didn't he tell his wife?"

"Perhaps he did," said John, very gravely.

"Then if he did—no, no, she would never—she *could* never—have helped him to do wrong! And yet—I said *it was remorse that killed her!*"

"Mary, never mention such an idea to anyone. Her name must be kept sacred. Never again let us allude to this even amongst ourselves. Remember, Mary, her name is sacred. What you have said must never be breathed again, not to any living creature."

"What will not a woman do for a man she loves?" said Mary, fervently.

"Never mind! never allude to it again," said John, sternly. "But now, about Jessie. Tell her to get on her hat as quickly as she can."

"You must tell her something first. It would nearly kill her to see him suddenly."

"Trust that to me," said John. "I'll go and take a turn in Catherine Court; send her out to me there."

"Can't you bring him in to dinner, presently; I'll have it kept."

"No, no! Never mind me, I'll take what comes."

Mrs. Bayliss ran downstairs at a rate that, had her mind been at sufficient leisure to notice, would have surprised even herself.

"Jessie," she said, putting her head inside the drawing-room; "come here, Jessie. Uncle John has brought you some wonderfully good news; he's gone out into Catherine Court. Put on your hat and run out to him there, he wants to talk to you."

Jessie sprang up, her eyes wide open with amazement.

"Good news! Good news for me! Why, what good news can he have for me? I never have any news!"

"Silly child, don't stand there talking, but get on your hat, and go out and hear it."

Jessie flew upstairs for her hat.

"I wonder, can he have seen Mac Carruthers! Can Mac have called?—or perhaps he knows of something better for him." And her fingers could hardly fasten her hat-strings for trembling.

"Good news! I can't imagine what it can be, unless—but that's nonsense—unless it's to do with Mac Carruthers! There's no one else it can be about!"

Hat and gloves were all she needed.

Down the stairs, past the swing door, now rosy in new red baize, along the hall and out into the street, over the pavement, under the old iron-work, round by the antiquated corner shop, and into the broad court between the two tall rows of early Georgian houses, she ran, and there, just by the horizontal lamp-rod and the curious gridiron-like arrangement against which last-century lamplighters had placed their ladders, was John Harbuckle standing, waiting for her.

He went a few steps to meet her flying form.

"Uncle John, uncle John! what's the good news! Oh, make haste, uncle John, I'm just mad for it," she cried.

“My dear child!” he said, and stopped, for the moment, unable to get any further.

“Why do you look so grave, if it’s good news?” Jessie cried, a wave of sudden terror rushing over her, and she lifted up a face all quivering with hope and fear to his.

“It *is* good news, my dear,” he said, greatly moved. “It *is* good news; so good that I’m afraid it will frighten you, like good news sometimes does; and yet, indeed Jessie, it need not frighten you, for it will make you very glad. Don’t be frightened!”

“Very well, then, I won’t! But—is it about Mac? About someone in Scotland?” She could not keep back the question, nor the blushes that went with it.

“About no one in Scotland,” said he, with a grave, unsteady smile. “Jessie, do you remember Trinity Monday?”

“Ah! you have seen that face again?” she cried, with a wild terror in her voice.

“Take my arm, my dear,” said uncle John.

She took it, he placed her hand firmly upon it, and put his own hand over hers. They both walked slowly along the court.

“Tell me all you remember about your father’s going away. You must have been about eleven years old then, I think,” asked John Harbuckle, in tones that tried to be calm.

"Oh, you've heard something about him! You have met a survivor of the dreadful wreck! Oh, uncle John!—it was all so terrible, I feel as if I should die when I think of it."

"Did your mother ever tell you he was drowned!" asked John Harbuckle.

"I read it in the *Times*. Poor little mother! I'm sure it killed her!"

"Think now, Jessie, think and answer carefully; *did your mother ever tell you your father was shipwrecked?*"

"Oh, uncle John, why do you talk about that dreadful time! It makes me shake all over only to think of it."

And indeed her hand was trembling so, that he pressed his own over it as if to still it.

"She told you, perhaps," he said, distinctly but with extreme solemnity, "that you were not to grieve too much, for that many people who were thought to be lost at sea, had been picked up."

"Yes, she often said that," said Jessie; "and I have always read all the stories of shipwrecks, I could find. When I was little, I often fancied my father would come back, but it's too long ago now."

"Haven't you read about people on desert

islands, and that sort of thing?" asked uncle John.

"He's come!" she cried; and although it was a warm summer evening her teeth chattered.

"I have heard that he is alive. Shall we go in, Jessie? Perhaps you'd better lie down and rest a little, before I tell you any more."

"Oh no, no! Go on! Oh, go on!"

"He's been out in Africa, all this time. It is possible you may meet him some day in London."

"I have met him! I'm sure it was he I saw that day! Oh why!—why didn't mother know he was alive! Oh, uncle John, she used to say such dreadful things! It drove her nearly mad, I think! She frightened me so much!—I can't get over it! It all comes back to me now!"

"Would you like to see your father, Jessie?"

"Oh yes! Yes! Where is he? You know, I see you know!"

John Harbuckle was feeling very much afraid of her, she trembled so, and looked so wild. He did not know what best to do; perhaps, after all, it would be better to tell her at once.

"Yes, Jessie, I know where he is; I met him half an hour ago in the Subway. He is waiting for you in the Tower Gardens."

“Let me go!” Jessie exclaimed, turning at once, but in a strange, vague, overwrought way. John Harbuckle turned with her; he hastened his steps, but kept her fluttering hand firmly on his arm.

They went out of the court, down the hill, to the gate opposite the bonded warehouses.

“See, there he is!” said John Harbuckle.

Jessie looked up with eyes brilliant with excitement to a tall figure half hidden by the trees. There was that in her face that quite unmanned John Harbuckle.

He unlocked the gate, stepped just within the Tower Gardens, then took the girl’s quivering face within his own trembling hands, bent over it kindly, and kissed it.

“God bless you, Jessie!” he said, huskily. Then he went outside the gate, locked it, gave her the key and turned slowly and sadly towards home.

“I did not know I had grown so fond of that dear girl!” said John Harbuckle; and the Tower Gardens grew very dim to him for a few moments.

Her father had come, but it was hard to give her up.

She had fluttered away from John Harbuckle, she was gone; he felt it was very hard to face Tower Hill and life without her.

## CHAPTER IX.

### WHAT THE BELL-TOWER SAW.

DARE we go further? Must we turn away with John Harbuckle, feeling that the meeting between the child and the long-mourned parent is too sacred for strangers' eyes to witness? Is it intrusion to enter the Tower Gardens?

Perhaps.

We to whom just now gates and moats and ballium walls are as nothing, why need we disturb them by our presence? Why may we not fly across the moat and perch somewhere out of their way, as soon as we have made up our minds that sympathy, and not mere idle curiosity, makes us wish to know what they will do and say?

Or shall we lose ourselves altogether? Shall we merge our identity into that of the old Bell-Tower at the opposite angle, the Bell-Tower whose quaint "look-out" seems now like a great bird-cage hanging in mid-air, sheer against the gentle sky of this summer

evening? Yes, we will be for a while that Bell-Tower.

During the many centuries we have stood at that angle what partings we have witnessed! We saw Thomas More's noble Margaret force her way through crowd and barrier to her doomed father's arms, as down below, there, by the Traitors' Gate, he followed the axe-edge. We saw that scene—the massive ring to which they fastened the rope that kept back the crowd is still in the wall of our neighbour, the Bloody Tower—we saw that despairing embrace, and are we not to witness the happy meeting over yonder in our own Tower Gardens? We must see it.

So we look across the moat to the path among the trees. A girlish form flutters onwards, a man comes to meet her, there are out-stretched arms, a cry, a sob, and the two figures are but as one.

After all the bitter farewells, who can blame us that we are glad?

A sudden shyness came over Jessie as she felt that John Harbuckle had left her.

For a moment she hesitated, faltered, but still went on. That tall man with the heavy beard was not quite like the father she remembered.

A faintness touched her, the gardens and the Tower grew misty to her. All she saw was the tall figure hurrying towards her.

They came nearer, he raised his hat, she caught his eyes, and knew he was indeed her father, ran to him and threw herself into his outstretched arms, where for a moment she seemed to lose all consciousness, although she did not faint.

He pressed her to him, kissing her again and again.

“Jessie!—Jessie!” between long pauses was all he could say. The voice so well remembered and so unchanged penetrated her dazed brain. She lifted her head from his shoulder, and held up her face to his.

He saw how over-wrought she looked.

“Darling, darling! How I have frightened you!” he said, kissing the sweet face. “Come to that bench! Lean on me!” He led her the few steps, they sat down and she leaned against him, still clinging to him, but still hardly conscious.

“You are getting better?” he asked, anxiously.

She muttered some faint, inarticulate sound. They sat still for some moments, and presently she cried a little with her face buried against

his shoulder ; while he could say nothing but “ Jessie ! Jessie ! ”

“ You are better ? ” he asked again after a while.

“ Yes ! ” she said with a long drawn sigh. “ Oh, Poozie ! why did you go away ? ” she asked, going back to the familiar childish name she used to give him in the days gone by ; and in spite of the ashen grey tint that still lingered on her face and lips, a little bit of childish grace rushed back with it.

“ Ah, Jessie ! Jessie ! How many and many a time have I heard you calling for your poor old Poozie ! ” said he, his eyes filling with tears.

“ Then why didn’t you come ? ” she asked, still faintly.

“ Because I couldn’t ! You don’t believe anything else but dire necessity could have kept me away from you, do you ? ” he answered, with a certain pathetic wistfulness that was quite his own.

“ Oh no ! ” Jessie answered with decision ; and then they were silent, and he stroked her hair and kissed it. “ Have you been on a desert island all this time ? ” she asked, presently, and she turned and looked at him with an interest that was almost childlike in its quaintness. The colour was returning to her face.

“Darling child, how lovely you’ve grown ! No, Jessie, I’ve neither been shipwrecked nor been living on a desert island ; but for all that I couldn’t come back before ; I couldn’t, or I should have come.”

“You don’t look like a desert-islander,” said Jessie, turning round to survey him the better.

Indeed Arthur Bayliss’s carefully tended *personnel* suggested any other character rather than Juan Fernandez or Robinson Crusoe.

“Ah, I’m so glad you weren’t shipwrecked !” Jessie went on. “I couldn’t bear you to be shipwrecked !” and she shuddered.

“Couldn’t you, darling ? Ah, child, how much I’ve wanted you ! Do you know I had a photograph of you and your mother with me ; every night I’ve kissed them all these years ; I don’t think I’ve missed once, except when I’ve been too ill to know anything.”

“Ah !” and in Jessie’s murmur of sympathy there was the tenderest, most caressing love, and the most pitying tears.

“Dear child, how lovely you’ve grown !” her father exclaimed again. “Let me look at you well ! To think I should own so much beauty ! But”—scanning her brightening face—“best of all, darling—you’ve grown so like her, so like your mother.”

"Ah! But do you know, I've seen *you* so often in the glass! That's why I knew you directly. Oh, do you know, I saw you—I've seen you before—dear father—oh, dear, dear father! I saw you one day—we were coming out of St. Olave's Church—there was a crowd—I was frightened—the service had been all about shipwrecks—I saw your eyes—I was sure they were your eyes, and I knew—I thought you were drowned—I was so frightened! And to think you were alive all the time! Oh!" and she broke down in a tumult of tears and laughter and kisses.

They could neither of them say anything more for a while, but presently he found words to tell her how he had seen her and watched her in those very gardens, and how he had not dared to speak to her, and had slunk back to his lodgings, and had been very ill with none but strangers to tend him.

He never knew how he managed to tell her that.

"But why—why—why didn't you speak to me?" cried Jessie, with a dread of hidden wrong.

"I saw you were happy, child!"

"And were you *never* coming to me? *Never?*"

"I wanted everything to be pleasant for you first, darling."

Her face grew very grave.

“ You shouldn’t have waited for that. We needed *you* more than pleasantness,” she said, with a gravity most unlike herself. And then her voice changed to tones of more acute distress. “ Oh ! if poor mother could only have known you were alive ! How could you let her think you were dead ? Oh!—it was too dreadful, it killed her. How could you let her be killed ? ”

He turned away, covering his eyes with his hand. For a few seconds he could not speak. Then he said in an authoritative, but broken-hearted tone :

“ Jessie, you may be quite sure of one thing: your mother would have welcomed me back without a reproach. She knew how much I loved you both, she could have formed some idea of what agony it has cost me to be separated from you.”

“ Dear, dear father, I don’t reproach you, only—oh ! she would have been so glad ! ”

“ Don’t speak of it, Jessie ; I can’t bear it.”

There was a long pause.

“ Tell me about yourself. You are living with aunt Mary at her brother’s ? ” he asked, making a great effort to rouse himself.

“ Yes ; where are you living ? Of course I’m coming to you. We can have a nice

little house all to ourselves, somewhere, can't we? That is"—and, remembering Mac, she suddenly broke down.

"Ah, child! there are difficulties to be faced."

"I'll face them!" said Jessie, bravely.

"Jessie! you've grown a real woman!"

He looked at her with fervent admiration. "But we mustn't discuss troublesome things to-day," he added. "Well, well, well, Jessie, how beautiful you've grown!"

"Beautiful? Oh, I'm so glad! I shouldn't like you to have come back and found me ugly; you don't mean it really, though, it's only because you're so glad to see me, and because you recognize likenesses in my face."

"Really, really, Jessie, I do," said he, in a lighter and brighter tone than he had yet used. It brought back to her the pleasant days before the great trouble came. "And so you are living with aunt Mary, and you're very happy?"

"Yes; but, oh father, such a winter in Scotland! It was dreadful! Aunt Mary's brother—he's such a good, kind old uncle John—"

"Is he though? And very fond of you?" interpolated Jessie's father, with perhaps a little more meaning than she quite understood.

“ Oh, yes ! So are they all. Uncle James—he was so like you—only—only, well, in some things he wasn’t—he had a farm—some money was left him, and he would take a farm because he and aunt Mary had been reading all sorts of horrid little books ; and the crops would get spoiled, and the stock would die, and there never was enough of anything ; and poor uncle James was killed——”

“ Killed ? ”

“ Yes, that is, he thought he knew all about reaping machines, and he didn’t, that was how it was. It was very terrible ; and poor auntie broke her heart about him, I do believe. She’s been quite different ever since. It was so dreary after he was dead ; frightfully, frightfully dreary, you can’t imagine how dreary ! ”

“ Can’t I ? Why I’ve been so dreary, that I wonder I’m alive at all ! But, Jessie,” and there came that pleasant recognisable light in his eyes, that was quite his own, “ it astonishes me to hear you say it was so dreary in Scotland. Were there no alleviations to that dreariness, eh ? ”—and he asked the question in so curious an accent, that Jessie, having looked up and caught his expression, suddenly looked down and coloured.

“ How do you know ? ” she asked, demurely.

"No one but a Scotchman could have given that absolutely literal answer about the London and North Western the other evening," said Arthur Bayliss, smiling.

Jessie started, in charming confusion.

"You heard him then?—you saw him when he came?"

"When he came tearing up to the railings?" he said. "Yes, I saw him, and you also—that was when I saw you. Ah, my darling! it was very dreadful to me; and yet I thanked God you were safe and happy. Come, Jessie, what's his name, and when is it to be, when are you going to be married? Not soon, I hope, it won't do to give you away as soon as I have found you."

"It's not to be for ever so long, not for six months yet," said Jessie. "His name is Mac—Mac Carruthers."

"And a very nice name, too! Does he want to take you back to Scotland?"

"We don't know; it's all so uncertain at present," and she told him how matters stood.

"Ah! I wish I had brought home a few stray thousands for you, darling!" said Arthur Bayliss, when he had heard Jessie's little story; which she managed to tell very prettily. "But perhaps it's all for the best;

I don't want to lose you yet. Who is that? Can it possibly be aunt Mary?"

And there, indeed, was Mrs. Bayliss, who had borrowed a neighbour's key, hurrying towards them.

"Oh, Arthur! I'm so glad!" she exclaimed, when they were within speaking distance, stretching out both her hands in welcome.

"So am I, Mary! How are you? Thank you, for all your kindness to my Jessie! She's all I could have wished her to be! She's so unspoiled. Thank you! Thank you!"

Then there was more weeping and rejoicing, and at last Arthur Bayliss was carried off in triumph by Jessie and her aunt to the house in Trinity Square, where a very savoury "fatted calf" (of which the lordly salmon was one ingredient) had been prepared to celebrate his return.

In vain Arthur Bayliss protested that he had already dined:

"It's no use, uncle Arthur," said Alison, "without such a festival we could not think you were safe at home! Without it you might again vanish! Without it we could not think you were real!"

The five of them therefore sat down at the festal board with joy and wonder, and pre-

tended to make a meal ; Mrs. Bayliss doing the honours in a dazed bewilderment ; Arthur Bayliss and his daughter sitting hand in hand, wondering that they should be together, their wonder growing every moment. Presently they all went into the drawing-room and sat round the open window in the deep twilight that was nearly as much darkness as would come that clear summer night.

Far off was heard the sound of street traffic not yet quite all gone ; it reached them only as the rushing of a river, like the Birren when not in spate. In a distant corner of the square a German band was playing popular Volkslieder “Du! Du!”—“Blau blüht ein Blümlein !” The trees in the gardens stood absolutely still, not a leaf was moving ; the street-lamps shone in the atmosphere singularly pure and sweet that comes to London sometimes at twilight.

Mrs. Bayliss and Arthur and his daughter sat together and talked, still with a feeling of awe and mystery, about James, and Africa, and other days.

John Harbuckle wandered aimlessly about the room for a time ; the quiet evening did not bring him peace. Presently, however, he went up to Alison and, putting his hand gently on her shoulder, he said under his voice :

“Come up to my den.”

Alison was feeling as if in the way, so was glad to go. They went upstairs together.

“I bought some old Wedgwood a few days before you came here,” said John Harbuckle. “If you wouldn’t mind helping me, Alison, I’d wash it now. It’s so dirty; I hardly know what it’s like, but I fancy we shall find it very good. I rather think it will match that tray in the drawing-room. I don’t seem to have had any time to look at it; so perhaps, if you don’t mind, my dear, we had better do it now. Would you mind collecting the things we shall require? They—h’m—I *don’t think they want us down-stairs just now.*”

## CHAPTER X.

### THE ECHO IN CATHERINE COURT.

"**T**HEY don't want us down stairs just now," said John Harbuckle to Alison, with a good deal of emphasis.

"They'll never need us any more," returned Alison; but without pausing an instant she went off to collect what was necessary for the cleaning of the Wedgwood.

John Harbuckle turned to the window, and looked out on the raven's twilight.

It was only a few evenings since that he had stood looking out on the same scene with his heart full of an almost paternal fondness for Jessie. He remembered pathetically how happy it had made him. That after glow of the one romance of his life had all faded now, it seemed; he felt chilled and sad. "But she belongs to him—she belongs to him; she is his daughter—she is his by right of nature—so it must be—so let it be!" he said to himself.

He heard the murmur of voices from the

drawing-room, he turned away and lighted his lamp.

When Alison came back, laden with all sorts of things, she found uncle John with his coat off, his sleeves tucked up, and quite ready for work.

They spent nearly two hours, he, in carefully washing the delicate porcelain and brushing out the grime from the finely cut little figures, she, in as carefully drying it on the softest old towel she could find.

Alison worked well, and steadily; for although she was too much excited to know or care what she was doing, there are states of mind in which the excitement of the brain lends unusual sureness and dexterity to the fingers. She neither broke nor chipped anything, although thought and touch had little connection with each other.

Uncle John was pleased with her apparent attention and the brightness of her eyes.

“There is a great deal of solid satisfaction to be derived from *things*; they are, perhaps, on the whole, more to be relied upon than persons,” said John Harbuckle, brushing the white clouds from which Aurora was rising (on the side of a vase); “it is well to have an affection for things. I have found them a great comfort at times. ‘Things and places—

the City more particularly, I have found full of interest and consolation. The City now-a-days has lost, so it seems to me, much of its permanence, there is such constant building and rebuilding going on, and even the time-honoured ground-plan is rapidly changing; but it is still a very great pleasure to me, it is still ‘Merrie London, my most kindly nurse.’”

“Yes,” said Alison, looking up from the saucer she was drying, “I like it better than any place I ever was in. That comes, perhaps, from having been born here. Oh! uncle John, I forgot to tell you, I went to the Guildhall Museum this afternoon, and found out more about Matilda Fitzwalter. Then I happened to see a map of Old London, and by it I found my way home by good part of the wall. First I went to Moorgate, then along London Wall to Bishopsgate, by Houndsditch to Aldgate, and along the Minories to the Tower. And, do you know, I’m going to call the Minories ‘The Street of The Little Sisters’—*Sorores Minores*, you know. What do you think of that, uncle John?”

Uncle John’s face suddenly beamed with delight.

“Dear, dear, dear me!” he exclaimed. “The thousands of times I’ve been through

the Minories, and the discussions Woolcomb and I and other ‘earth-worms’ have had about the Convent of the Poor Clares that used to be there--and none of us ever thought of calling it in your simple poetic English, ‘The Street of The Little Sisters ! ’ ”

“ Poetic ? ” said Alison, blushing with delight ; and with something of the feeling with which Jessie had asked, “ Wonderful ? ” the other evening in the Tower Gardens.

“ Poetic ! yes, my dear. Ah ! ”—and uncle John looked at her with an expression she had never seen on his face before—“ how much everything in this world needs a woman’s touch ! ”

Alison felt moved, but sought refuge in a remark that she too often made to herself :

“ I’m afraid mine is very clumsy ! ”

“ No, no, I can’t have you say that ! ” ‘ The Street of The Little Sisters ! ’ Truly womanly of you, Alison, to think of so charming a name for that remarkably ugly street ! Woolcomb will be more than ever impressed with your qualities, he’ll be quite enraptured ! ”

So they chatted on until it struck John Harbuckle that it must be very late.

“ Well, my dear, I think we must put the things away and go down. I’m very much pleased with the stuff. It’s much better than

I had fancied ; but I think I shall let Wool-comb have it. Let us go down."

They found the other three just where they had left them, still talking by the open window in the dark.

Arthur Bayliss rose as he heard the door opened.

" Then you'll come round to breakfast to-morrow ? " were the first words that reached John Harbuckle's ear as he entered the room.

It was his sister, Mary Bayliss, who uttered them ; and John Harbuckle knew, with a certainty that left no room for questioning, that he was no longer the master of his own house.

Arthur Bayliss did not accept the invitation readily, so John Harbuckle felt compelled to say :

" We shall expect you, Bayliss."

Courtesy, right feeling, demanded the words, but it struck John Harbuckle that he had signed his own deed of abdication.

" Thanks. Yes, I'll come round," said Bayliss, shaking hands with everybody.

Then he left the room, Jessie clinging to his arm as if afraid of losing him again, and Mrs. Bayliss following.

" I ought to be very thankful he's come back safe and sound," John Harbuckle said to

himself ; “of course, I ought to be glad ; but somehow I can’t rise to it. I suppose I shall be used to it in time, but at present I can’t rise to it. It’s no use trying, I can’t.”

Jessie and Mary had gone down to the door with the long-lost Arthur. The sound of laughing, and talking, and lingering “Good-byes” came up from the open door below to the open window above.

“I wonder if Mary would welcome me back so cordially, if I went away ? I think she might have let Jessie see him off alone. Well, well, I never was attractive,” he said to himself. “Alison, you must try and keep Jessie quiet ; take her upstairs at once, you mustn’t let her talk any more to-night.”

“Oh, no, we won’t talk, of course, we’ll try to be quiet. But isn’t it a wonderful thing about uncle Arthur? Isn’t it a grand thing for Jessie? Isn’t he handsome, and so very like my poor father! Altogether, I feel in a perfect whirl. And he thinks Jessie has grown so lovely. So she has ; she seems to me prettier than any other girl I’ve ever met. I hope he won’t take her away. Why couldn’t he come and live here? Well, perhaps that wouldn’t do, I don’t know. Perhaps they’ve arranged something else, only I do hope he won’t take her away.”

"He will, you may depend upon it," said John Harbuckle, from a dark and distant corner, where he was pottering about nervously among his book-shelves.

"That will be horrible," said Alison; "but of course she belongs to him, only I do so hate giving up people I'm fond of. I'm a greater coward at parting than at anything else."

"My case, precisely," said John Harbuckle.

"There, at last they've shut the door," said Alison. She put her head out of the window and called :

"Good-night, uncle Arthur."

"Good-night!" he returned; he had already gone some little distance. Then the door was opened again, and by the light of the street-lamp, Alison saw Jessie running along the pavement after him.

She drew in her head.

Arthur Bayliss turned at the sound of the light, quick step.

Jessie ran up to him, threw her arms round his neck, and buried her head against his breast, crying :

"I wish you weren't going! I wish you weren't going! I'm afraid of losing you again!"

He kissed her many times.

"Well, darling, it's only for a few hours," he said.

"I'm afraid of your not being real," she whispered. "You'll be sure to come early to-morrow?"

"If I'm alive," he answered with more kisses. He led her back to the house again. She tore herself away from him, and ran upstairs to the window.

That last clasp of Jessie's arms was almost too much for her father; he was trembling all over with the thrill of it when he turned into Catherine Court on his way back to Fenchurch Avenue, and for a few moments he held on to the ironwork at the entrance. He had lived through so much emotion since he had met John Harbuckle early that evening in the Tower Subway, that he now felt as if he could hardly stand.

"My dear little girl! My dear little girl!" was all he could say to himself; but the joy of it was now absolute pain.

Presently he felt better and went on; went past the house where his wife had lived in her girlhood, and along the court through which he had led her when he and she had returned from Barking Church close by, as bridegroom and bride.

He lingered a little while there, feeling, with

something almost like content, that Jessie's mother, could she know of that night's meeting, would rejoice.

Then he went on. There were no lights in the houses now; he was the only person in Catherine Court. He passed quickly between the two high walls at the end of the court, and the walls echoed back his step.

It startled him; the echo seemed like the foot-fall of that evil deed that was always on his track.

He started, but passed on at once through Seething Lane, past the Gate of the Dead, now touched by the soft summer moonlight, by Hart Street, Mark Lane, Fenchurch Street, Fen Court to the Avenue; and there, on the handsome brass plate within the doorway, he read, as he let himself in, the name, "Arnold Birkett."

It seemed to stand up and confront him as the very substance of that evil deed that always followed him, of whose dogging foot-fall he had heard as the echo of his own between the high walls of Catherine Court.

Arnold Birkett—a mere name, as he knew only too well—was a very ugly difficulty to face, and Arthur Bayliss was not a radically brave man.

That name rose up ominously between himself and his new-found Jessie.

How could he bring Jessie Bayliss there while “Arnold Birkett” was on that plate and he was known by that name?

After he had rang several times the door was opened by Mr. Jim Robbins. Arthur Bayliss went into the wide stone hall, “Arnold Birkett,” in black paint upon the first door on the right, met him there also.

It was a fine large house, only just finished. He went up several flights of stairs to his private rooms.

Beyond the few things necessary they were not yet furnished. They were large, bare, and unhomelike.

“They want Jessie!” he said; “they must have Jessie! How is it to be done? She can’t come here and live with ‘Arnold Birkett!’ How am I to tell her? I can’t; I must.”

Between “I can’t” and “I must” Arthur Bayliss passed a restless night; but by the morning “I must” had conquered.

“I must tell John Harbuckle all,” he said. “It will be a bitter task; but it will have to be done; there’s no help for it. But all my tasks have been bitter since that one fatal act. Good God, is there never forgiveness!”

he cried, in despair. “ I could almost wish I had never returned ; never seen my sweet girl’s face nor felt her clasp ! I am bound to ‘ Arnold Birkett ’ like the Roman criminal to the corpse ! There’s no help for it now. I must tell John Harbuckle ! ”

As Arnold Birkett, Arthur Bayliss had lived and done business for several years abroad. As Arnold Birkett he was already known in the City ; as Arnold Birkett he had taken the offices in Fenchurch Avenue, and under that name had a considerable connection in London, in Manchester, and on the coast of Africa. The Tildesleys, all his few fresh friends, knew him as Arnold Birkett. Arnold Birkett was in the business world an individual with a definite position ; Arthur Bayliss was a man long since dead and almost forgotten, except, perhaps, by those who happened to have been his creditors.

It was a very grave difficulty, he could not see his way out of it.

In that long conversation by the open window of the house in Trinity Square he had never alluded to Arnold Birkett ; and indeed, when Mary Bayliss came to put that conversation together in her thoughts, it struck her that, although he had talked much and told them a great deal about Africa, and also

something of his hopes and his prospects in London, he had, after all, said very little about himself.

Mary wanted to ask her brother-in-law a great many questions ; but as she felt sure they would not be answered, she resolved to wait, and let the truth—about which her curiosity was vividly aroused—reveal itself by degrees. She was certain, however, that she should never rest satisfied until she could make a consecutive narrative of Arthur's proceedings from the day he had left Jessie's mother, under circumstances not yet clear to her, until the meeting with John Harbuckle in the Tower Subway. During that long conversation she had once tried to approach the real heart of the subject, but Arthur Bayliss had gently talked away from it.

“ Whatever it is, she—Jessie’s mother—would have forgiven him ; and I’m sure I do. He brings back—ah, but how slightly !—he brings back my James, and that’s more than all to me.”

So Mary determined to be very kind to him. John Harbuckle, whom she could never quite forgive for taking her from Birrendale, was more than once or twice seized with pangs of jealousy, and felt, as it were, chronically hurt. John Harbuckle could not help seeing, that in

comparison to Arthur Bayliss he himself was simply nobody to Mary.

Mary drove her brother out early next morning to go and prowl about and see what he could find very nice for breakfast, and the old bachelor, always an admirable caterer (married men may smile incredulously, but I will maintain this as a fact), the old bachelor, I repeat, returned in due time with a bag full of the most delicious "examples" that the different markets could supply, including roses for the table and the personal adornment of the girls.

The roses were just the very match for Jessie's cheeks, as she sat, with Mac's newly-arrived letter in her pocket, looking towards Catherine Court, whence, every moment, she expected her father to emerge.

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were bright, but her hands were icy cold, although the sun was already strong.

At last there he was ; she flew downstairs to give him the first welcome. Fairer than ever she looked to him ; but even as he hurried to meet her, that dreadful shadow, that "Arnold Birkett," seemed to be standing between them. But Jessie lifted her face right through the shadow she had never seen, and her father bent through it and kissed her.

Jessie was very merry that morning. Her father had not vanished into thin air ; she was delighted to see him again.

During breakfast her tongue ran on and on as if it would never stop.

Her father promised to take the girls to the theatre in the evening ; that was another new delight to her, for uncle John had never taken them to a theatre.

“Can you spare me half an hour ?” asked Arthur Bayliss, looking across the table to John Harbuckle, when breakfast was finished ; “I should be glad if you could come round to my office in Fenchurch Avenue at once ; but if you can’t, suppose we say at five o’clock ?”

“Why not stay here and talk ?” put in the widow, who was anxious to detain him as long as possible.

“I’m at your service now,” said John Harbuckle, quietly.

“You’ll dine with us of course, Arthur ?” said Mary, as the two men rose to leave.

“Well no, not to-day ; thank you all the same.”

“We’ll have it early for the girls, you know,” said Mary.

“I’ll call for them in good time. In the meanwhile, perhaps Jessie will look over the

paper and see if she and Alison can hit upon a play that will suit them both."

"Yes! Yes!" said Jessie. "But mayn't I come and see your office?"

"Let us all go!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, in a tone so gushing that it made Jessie say to herself: "I suppose they all think he belongs to them; but they'll soon find out he belongs only to me."

"Time's running on," said John Harbuckle.

"Well," said the widow, "I suppose we mustn't intrude upon business hours." But she relinquished the idea of seeing the brother-in-law's place with evident reluctance.

"I think you might let me come with you, father," said Jessie, as if a little hurt.

"Presently, my darling. You'll be ready in good time this evening? Poor child!"—for she clung to him—"do you think I won't come back? Of course I will. Do you suppose I don't want to see how pretty you're going to look this evening? There! there! Good-bye!"

He tried to speak lightly, and he laughed, and nodded at the little group that was watching him from the door, but he felt terribly ill at ease as he adjusted his long stride to John Harbuckle's slower and shorter step.

They were soon among the men who were now arriving from all quarters. Arthur Bayliss, had he been alone, would have walked along at the same brisk, business-like rate as the majority of his fellow pedestrians ; but John Harbuckle had acquired an habitual saunter, and whether he trod the City pavement on a Sunday, when he had it nearly all to himself, or on a week-day morning, when he shared it with busy thousands, he never varied his pace.

The two men, so dissimilar in every particular, walking side by side, and talking only on such topics as the alterations that Bayliss noticed, came in a few minutes to Fenchurch Avenue.

“ Which,” said Arthur Bayliss, “ seems to me newer than anything else I have yet met with ; it suggests to me, indeed, New York rather than London. I was never more surprised than when I came for the first time up that narrow little dark turning out of Fenchurch Street, and found myself here, where Fen Court used to be.”

New enough it certainly was, for buildings were still in process of erection, and old ones of demolition.

The church-yard of the vanished church of St. Gabriel occupied one corner. It had been recently fresh gravelled—it was neatly swept

and garnished, and owned a few green trees. A broad asphalt pavement ran from it right up to great tall blocks of new offices, as handsome as polished granite and plate glass could make them. An old house or two, with narrow windows and semi-circular porticos, like inverted shells, although nearly squeezed out of existence by its modern neighbours, still lingered on here and there; suggesting by a certain domesticity in its architecture that homes had once been made in the heart of the City.\*

"My friend Woolcomb's father used to live in that house they're pulling down," said John Harbuckle. "It was an interesting example of a London merchant's house; there was some undoubted Jacobean work in it. Which is your place? Why, bless me!—there's Robbins!"

"Do you know that fellow? He's the brother of our caretaker," said Arthur Bayliss.

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\* I have to confess with shame that when this passage was written I had not read Mrs. Riddell's masterpiece, "George Geith." The description of Fen Court, as it was in George Geith's time, "As quiet and forsaken-looking a spot as the heart of man could desire to see, where the houses and the trees make a shade even at mid-day," struck me as so picturesque a contrast to the Fenchurch Avenue of the present, that I cannot help referring to it here. Fen Court now exists only in "George Geith;" "the house which stood next but one to the old gate-way on the Fenchurch Street side," on the second floor of which George Geith and his sweet Beryl lived, has shared the fate of that belonging to the father of John Harbuckle's friend Woolcomb.

"Is he though?" observed John Harbuckle with interest. "And are you 'the party' for whom he's looking up a sideboard?"

"Well, I did say something about it, I believe. I've taken the top rooms here, as I've already told you."

"Bless me! Dear, dear, dear me! Then, it was about your sideboard I went over to Bermondsey yesterday. What a very strange coincidence!"

"A very fortunate one, since it led to our meeting. Curiosity took me down the Subway," said Bayliss. "Is the thing worth having?"

"At a price; it is genuine, but not a fine work. What does he ask?"

"So much."

"Too much. Offer him such a sum; he'll take it."

"All right, then; I'll make it rather over that under the happy circumstances."

"Well, Robbins, you didn't get my card this morning," said John Harbuckle, stepping up to his late factotum.

"No, sir; I were just a-coming on to you. But," lowering his voice, "blest if that ain't the party!—that's the Mr. Birkett it's for. Did you see it, sir?"

"My friend will give you so much for the

sideboard ; that's more than it's worth," said John Harbuckle.

" Oh, sir ! " exclaimed Robbins, as if with horror, " why the man over the water'll charge me that ! "

" I don't think so," observed John Harbuckle, in his driest tone. " Well, there's the offer ; you can do what you like with it."

" I suppose I must take it, as Mr. Birkett's likely to want something else," said the crest-fallen Robbins.

" Very well ; you'll not lose by it. Good day," said John Harbuckle, and he followed Arthur Bayliss into the hall of one of the new houses, saying to himself :

" Birkett ! What does he mean ? What's that on the plate, ' Arnold Birkett and Co. ? ' What's that on the office door ? -- ' Arnold Birkett.' "

They passed through a large, well-appointed office, where a couple of clerks were at work, into the private room.

" Who is Arnold Birkett ? " John Harbuckle asked, when they were together in the room and the door had been closed.

" I am," said Arthur Bayliss. " Sit down, Harbuckle, that's what I want to talk to you about. I don't know what to do."

There was a comfortable chair on each side

of the new desk-table ; the two men sat down opposite each other. John Harbuckle noticed, and it touched him, how haggard Bayliss's face grew as he spoke. He looked across anxiously, as if waiting for further confidence.

" You see now why I didn't want the others to come here until you had been. God knows how much I want to be free from that wretched name and all it means," Bayliss went on.

" Can't you drop it ? " asked John Harbuckle.

Arthur Bayliss told him about as much as you know already.

" No ; I don't see how I can ; at least not yet awhile. I've made such a splendid start here ; if I can only keep up the pace for a year or two I may be able to make everything square. You will believe me when I say I am above everything anxious to set myself right with the world. In the meanwhile, how am I to have Jessie here ? "

" Jessie's going to be married," said John Harbuckle.

" That's in the future," said Jessie's father ; " that may never happen. Look here," lie went on, rising as he spoke, " if I get talking about these matters I shall be quite unfit for business. I wanted you to come here now, because I didn't like the idea of any of you

hearing of it second-hand. Can you look in at five o'clock? I've a press of business to-day that I must get through somehow, although I feel more dead than alive. Harbuckle"—he hesitated, and grew paler—"come at five, I'll tell you all, I must tell some one, or I shall go mad. I can't tell Jessie, nor Mary. Come at five. Here's Tildesley and another man. You'll be here at five precisely?—you won't keep me waiting, will you?"

There was an urgent appeal in the last question that went straight to John Harbuckle's heart; he was very sorry for Arthur Bayliss.

"At five precisely," he replied, firmly, and left the office.

"He killed her," said John Harbuckle, as he faced the swept and garnished churchyard in Fenchurch Avenue, "I see it in his face! he killed her! God help him and me too!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### JESSIE AS A PERSON OF IMPORTANCE.

IT was all one bewilderment to Mary and the girls in the old-fashioned house in Trinity Square after the men had departed.

Jessie, who had been quiet and subdued yesterday evening, was now in that state of excitement when a girl talks a great deal of nonsense. At the end of half-an-hour, occupied by talking and, during lucid intervals, by arranging her own and Alison's toilette for the evening, Jessie had talked herself into the position of a person of importance.

“Now, eminent literary woman,” she began, as she tried on the lace she had half made up her mind to wear; “now, authoress, now is your time for making studies of a real, undoubted, genuine heroine! I told you I always knew I was born to be a heroine! Now for your novel, Alie. (I say—shall I dye this with tea or saffron or keep it as it is? Very pale saffron, with flowers to match, eh? like that girl we

saw at St. James's Hall last Monday ; that will do best, won't it?). Yes, Alie, do *me* well, my child, and your fortune's made ! Will you just put down those old dry-as-dust books and give the whole of your gigantic intellect to me. You know I'm immensely proud of you, I've told my father you're the cleverest girl in London, so you must sustain your reputation. Will you, or won't you make a study of me ? Will you do me—me with a father come to life again, or are you going to throw away the finest chance ever presented to any scribbling woman on this round earth ? What ! Oh, I'm nothing compared to the Tower, I suppose ! The blindness—the blindness of some people I could mention ! Well, I mean to be written about, so if you won't do it—I'll just do it myself. Now, if poor Mac Carruthers were here, wouldn't I make him mount Pegasus ! and wouldn't I make his Pegasus go ! but as for you, Alison—it makes me savage to think I can't drive you. You're just the only person in the world I can't drive. I often wonder what sort of a mind you can have. Something very different from mine ! ”

“ Yours ! Why you haven't one. The idea of your having a mind ! ”

“ Haven't I ! My father thinks I have, I

can tell you. Just the sort of mind a woman ought to have, he says; and he ought to know; he's been about the world a great deal and used his eyes."

"And his eye-lashes," remarked Alison.

She could not resist saying it; but she felt immediately that under the circumstances it was a trifle too sarcastic.

Jessie, however, did not think so; she at once launched out into extravagant praises of her father's looks and ways, which resulted in Alison's recalling so vividly the grave beside the Birren Water that tears came into her eyes; so that Jessie had to throw away her finery and embrace her cousin and cry too. Presently, smiles and nonsense having returned, a cabinet council was held, at which it was proposed by Jessie, and seconded by Alison, that the saffron lace would not be worthy of the occasion, and that they had not a decent pair of gloves between them.

"Can we conscientiously say we must have something fresh?" asked Jessie, with immense solemnity.

"We can," returned Alison, decisively.

"Beautiful, beautiful thing, I shall have to part with you!" said Jessie, addressing a crisp five-pound note her father had just given her "to get any little odds and ends she might want."

Jessie gazed at the note with fond admiration ; it made her father feel real to her, and it also made her feel extremely rich ; for seldom before this had she possessed more than half-a-crown at a time ; and since uncle James's death even the half-crowns had come very rarely. Uncle John never gave Jessie money, although through Mrs. Bayliss he paid for a good many things for her.

"We'll just go and lavish it !" said Jessie ; "for once in my life I should like to know the sensation ! And, Alison, I must make you look really nice to-night !"

"Oh, never mind me ! " said Alison. "Besides, I can't run to more than eight three-farthings."

"No, because you've been spending all your money on me ! Never mind, I'm going to pay you out for it now ! "

So the two girls had a most delightful walk to St. Paul's Churchyard, where they looked in at all the shops, and where Jessie changed the first five-pound note she had ever owned with a feeling of having suddenly become one of the most important persons in Her Majesty's dominions ; a feeling which above all she enjoyed.

In the afternoon, however, her head ached dreadfully, and she was glad to lie down for a couple of hours. It was a trouble to her to

write even a few lines to Mac ; she began a note, but it was not easy to tell him in a dozen words what had happened. So after she had written, " My dearest Mac, I have something to tell you which will surprise you very much," she could go no further, and no note was sent that day. It was the first time she had missed writing to him.

" Thank God for the daily work that must be done!" exclaimed John Harbuckle, devoutly, on his return to his office, where he found several men waiting for orders, a pile of letters to read and answer, and a reminder that there was an urgent affair demanding immediate attention.

" Thank God for daily work ! " From how many aching hearts do the words ascend every hour of every day, with thanks not only for the daily bread the daily work brings, but for the daily work that enables them to live through their daily sorrow. Men and women who hated the morning light that brought with it a fresh sense of bereavement, or calamity, rise to find their daily task awaiting them, and as the hours go by the crushing load of grief grows less, until, if they cannot smile at their work, they can at least be calm, for :

" God in cursing gives us better gifts  
Than man in benediction."

That daily work that *must* be done, it meets us in the morning like a terrible and imperious tyrant ; but its very tyranny is its value. So felt Arthur Bayliss after he and John Harbuckle had parted. It was dreadful to him to have to set to work, but it helped him to get through the day ; and there are days in the lives of all of us that it seems we could hardly live through without such help.

This was one of them to him.

“At five precisely? You’ll not keep me waiting?”

Arthur Bayliss’s last words had sounded to John Harbuckle like the patient’s appeal to the surgeon who is coming to perform a ghastly operation, or like Anne Boleyn’s, “I pray you despatch me quickly,” to the headsman over yonder on the Tower Green, just the other side of the little church, whose quaint belfry John Harbuckle saw from his own doorstep when he left home that evening to keep his appointment.

The first of the neighbouring clocks struck five as the old bachelor entered the narrow passage that leads from Fenchurch Street to the Avenue ; the last had not finished striking when he again read on the well-polished brass plate the name, “Arnold Birkett.”

At the porter's desk in the hall was Mr. 'Jim' Robbins, who informed him that Mr. Birkett was upstairs and would be glad to see him at once.

It was a very long way up to the top of the tall house, but at last John Harbuckle reached the room and Arthur Bayliss.

The room was large and well proportioned, full of glaring light from the uncurtained windows, but containing little else except a sofa, a table and a couple of chairs.

Arthur Bayliss was pacing up and down in a state of desperate excitement.

"You're punctual," he exclaimed, throwing his cigar into the grate, "I couldn't have stood this much longer."

"I've come as you requested me to do," said John Harbuckle, quietly, taking a chair; "but, remember, I have no wish to force your confidence in any way."

"I must tell some one, I shall go mad if I don't! I must tell you!" said Bayliss, pulling at his moustache in extreme agitation, and still walking about. "It was not a premeditated act. I had no thought of it; I never dreamed of such a thing until the very moment. God left me, the Devil tempted me; I was distracted, mad, I saw a chance, the Devil must have shown it me. I rushed at it at once--

like a moth at a candle—it was done beyond recall before I had time to think."

He spoke in abrupt sentences, pacing up and down the while, and talking on as if rather to himself than to his visitor.

"We were so happy at first," he went on ; "she loved me so—she was everything, all the world to me—our little girl was so sweet to both of us. It was too good to last ; it seems like heaven to look back upon—my life's been hell ever since. Then my brother James got into trouble (he always was in trouuble, poor fellow), I had to help him out of it. Then, as you will remember, there was the bank failure. Nothing went right after that. I ought to have stopped sooner, perhaps, but I was so proud of our firm, we had done so well—I struggled on and on, grew more and more involved, knew bankruptcy was inevitable. Things became desperately bad ; I had one hope—I didn't know the world then as I do now, or I shouldn't have been fool enough to entertain it—but I had one last hope. There was a man in Paris, the head of a large house there ; I had made that man, I had helped him (I was always too ready to help others ; much good has it done me!), I had helped that man, Harbuckle, I had helped him at a crisis when not any other creature would

lend him a pound; I said to myself after I had written in vain, ‘If I go and see him he must come to the rescue now.’ I was afraid, not knowing from one day to the next what might happen, to leave my wife and child in Liverpool, I took them with me as far as Boulogne. I went to Paris, I saw that man.” He paused, and for the moment could not speak, then with a fierce gesture, as if he were flinging the man violently from him, he went on, “What’s the use of talking of it? That hope, my last, like all else, was rotten and failed me. I returned to Boulogne, to Jessie, and our little girl. I saw them, they tried to soothe me. Jessie, poor darling, broken-hearted as she was, tried hard to give me hope again. I could not endure the sight of them, it was torture, pure and simple, to be with them. We were to return to Liverpool in the evening. I knew there was no hope, that my last chance was gone, that I must meet my creditors, that I had scarcely anything to offer them ; it seemed to me worse than death. Yet I ought to have gone on ; if I had only been brave, I might have righted myself as other men have done. But I was a coward, and the Devil knew I was ! I could not endure to look at the wife and child whom I had ruined. And yet it was hardly my fault, after all ; I had striven

my hardest, and up to that time I had done nothing wrong. I walked about the streets of that wretched town for hours, because I could not face them. It has always been my curse that I could never face distress. At last—how horribly distinct it all is to me still!—at last I went for refuge and rest, for I was nearly worn out, into the reading-room in the old Museum there. I can see it all now, the French soldier reading a yellow-covered book, the old curator munching an apple; there was no one else there. I took up an English paper, there were several on the table; I did not read it, I could not see a word, until, at last, out of the meaningless print there arose—and the type seemed to grow gigantic as I looked at it—my own name—Arthur Bayliss!—It was among the deaths. My attention was at once aroused. I hurried through the announcement and in another instant, as if by a flash of lightning, a way of escape was revealed. You saw the announcement, I dare say?"

"Under the date of the 7th of April?" asked John Harbuckle. "I saw it."

"Would to heaven *I* had *not* seen it!" exclaimed Arthur Bayliss. "A man of my name was lost, with many others, in the foundering of the African mail steamer,

‘Mellicurrie.’ He was a Liverpool man; the steamer was lost off the Wexford Coast; she sailed the day I had left England. Everything fitted exactly; I saw at once what I could do—I must have been mad—I believe I was; what I did had that sure, unerring swiftness that accompanies some forms of madness. I went out, bought black-edged paper and money orders; wrote to the English papers, paid for three more insertions of the notice, to contain, in addition to the one I had read, *my own Liverpool address in full*. I repeat, I must have been mad to have done such a thing; but, mad as I was, I was only too successful—I, who had failed so desperately in my lawful strivings, succeeded now. Every farthing I had in the world was in my pocket. I sent the greater part of it to my wife. I wrote—I don’t know how—a letter to her, I told her all, I implored her, by her love to me, to appear in Liverpool in widow’s weeds. I told her I was going to Africa, the only place where I knew I should be sure to find employment at once. I told her that in a few months I should be able to send for her; I tried to paint a lovely, peaceful home in Madeira, where she would grow well and strong, and where I could see her sometimes. Ah! It was that pictured home in Madeira that

lured me on—no, no—perhaps it was not—it was my own cowardice, my dread of facing exposure!—but I could let her face it! I was mad—I could not have done such a thing had I been sane, I who would have thought nothing of risking my life for her. I went to Africa, I found work; I made money—but all too late—too late to save her! I have let Time pay my debts; I have returned. That's all I have to say. The rest you know as well—better—than I.” And Arthur Bayliss—who had paused for a moment, while he had uttered the last sentence, turned abruptly and went out on to the little balcony in front of the open window.

When Bayliss had begun his narrative, John Harbuckle’s clear blue eyes had followed him in his pacings up and down the room with a peculiarly keen, penetrating glance. As the tragedy in which he was himself so deeply interested was hurriedly unfolded, he turned away from the speaker. With his arms resting on his knees and his hands tightly clasped in front of them, he bent forward and looked intently on the floor.

After Bayliss had finished, John Harbuckle retained the same position for some time; but his eyes were closed, his hands more tightly clasped, his brow drawn and

deepened, his usual fresh colour gone; his bowed grey head looking altogether greyer and older than it had done when he had met Arthur Bayliss, twenty-four hours ago, in the Tower Subway.

It was not in him then to feel again the agitation that had seized him when first the sound of that voice had hurried him wildly along the path above the moat, exclaiming:

“He robbed me of my Jessie! Here in these very gardens!”

He had heard that voice now going on and on; but it had not been to him like a voice, so much as the solemn unfolding of the mystery that had surrounded that Jessie’s death. It was all so past—so irrevocable, so beyond human help now; its very hopelessness brought calm.

“Have you nothing to say?” presently asked Arthur Bayliss from the balcony, in the tone of wild despair he had used all along.

“Nothing,” replied John Harbuckle, only his lips moving.

He sat motionless with his head bowed. He knew that other man was there; he knew—the very words passed through his brain—that man had tortured to death his Jessie, the Jessie they had both loved, using her conscience as the weapon to kill her with; her

face, so full of bewildered anguish—her face as he had last seen it—was gazing at him with horror now. That man was a coward—that man had put her to a cruel death; but that man's heart and life were broken. That man had confided in him—trusted him. It was not possible to reprove him now, neither was it possible to speak to him friendly words.

John Harbuckle rose, put on his hat and slowly walked out of the room.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AT THE THEATRE.

“ **I**F Mac could only see me ! ” said Jessie, as she stood before the glass, giving a few last touches to her toilette.

Jessie was quite astonished at herself, never before had she seen her image looking so beautiful. She hardly recognized herself, and yet she was certain that what she looked at was the reflection of Jessie ; but it was Jessie idealized, etherealized, the Jessie of a poem or of a picture ; not the work-a-day Jessie, who had made scones in Birrendale, nor the merely festive Jessie, who had danced the Highland Schottische with Mac at the ball where they had first met.

This was a Jessie seen under the exquisite light and shade of emotions too absorbing to be concealed as different from any other Jessie as the Tower, seen under a summer moonlight, or twilight, or on a spring morning, half-veiled in wreaths of mists, is from the same Tower on a grey prosaic day at noon.

Jessie was vain, her vanity was pleased, but to-night she rather stood in awe of herself, of her position, of everything. For the time even her merry tongue wagged not.

At the appointed hour her father arrived. Jessie gave one look at Alison, whose appearance more than compensated her for the care she had bestowed upon her—and another at herself, and went downstairs in her only long skirt, a pale grey silk, John Harbuckle's gift.

She came into the drawing-room in her floating silk and her soft laces and faint blush roses with a strange mingling of self-consciousness and dreamy unreality in her expression ; her bright eyes more dewy than usual, her lips curving with a trembling smile.

“Am I—can I be the owner of so much beauty?” asked her father, stepping towards her.

But the words failed to flatter her. Her heart, her face chilled with anxiety—the curve of her lips straightened.

“Father! how ill you look! What has happened?”

“Yesterday tried me very much, my darling,” he said, kissing her.

“And me too,” she said, with a sigh, and for an instant her head sank upon his shoulder. Then Mrs. Bayliss came in. Her brother-in-

law's appearance struck her. He was looking wretchedly ill, his eyes were dim, his face a faded yellow; but his beard and moustache curled as crisply as ever; and she thought that since her husband's death she had not seen a man with so fine a figure as his looked in his evening clothes.

And here I may say that her affection for her husband made her unjust to his brother. James Bayliss had lacked both the finish and one of the inches of Arthur, Jessie's father.

It was not often that Mrs. Bayliss looked at her daughter with approval, but she nodded and smiled this evening, when Alison appeared, in almost the same dress as Jessie's, only her roses were darker.

"Where's uncle John?" asked Alison, looking round the room.

"Oh, he's writing to Mr. Woolcomb, or to some other of his old fossils," said Mrs. Bayliss. "He wouldn't care to be disturbed."

"It's getting late; we had better start at once," said Arthur Bayliss, uneasily. "Come, Jessie," and he laid her hand on his arm, as if to walk away with her.

"Wait one minute," cried Alison, and ran up to John Harbuckle's den.

"Uncle John! uncle John! We're going!" she called at the door.

"Come in, my dear," said he, and Alison went in.

John Harbuckle was not writing, he was reading the Gospel according to St. Luke ; that third Gospel, the symbol of which devout minds have seen in the third living creature of Revelations, that had a face as of a man ; the Gospel of the Son of Man.

He looked grave, sad, old. Alison was for a moment sorry she had disturbed him.

"You look very nice, my dear, very nice," he said, turning round and surveying his niece. Alison thought he seemed so sad and lonely that her heart smote her that she was going to leave him alone ; for she knew he would not go downstairs to his sister ; she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"They are waiting. I must go. I wish I might stay at home with you," she said, hurriedly.

"Don't keep them, Alison. Good-bye, my dear," he said. "You look very nice. I shall think of you."

He spoke so seriously, Alison felt quite touched.

"What has happened to uncle John ?" she asked herself, as she ran downstairs.

Now Jessie and, in a lesser degree, Alison,

appreciated the way in which Arthur Bayliss took them out.

It was a great satisfaction to Jessie to find that her father approved of evening dress for evenings. It had been so long since she had worn it that it was quite an event. Uncle John had taken them to concerts now and then ; but he never made a change in his own dress, and expected them to go in their walking jackets.

Jessie could not but feel that her father in this respect showed himself a very superior person. Also, he did not propose they should go by train, neither did he merely send for a cab, but drove round for them in a brougham. Evidently Jessie's father knew the ways of the world, and the proper methods of taking girls about. What a delightful thing to find oneself suddenly the owner of such a father !

“ And, indeed,” she said in her heart, as they drove down Tower Hill, “ I can’t wonder that my poor little mother preferred him to uncle John. Really, I don’t see how she could help it ! I think Mac will like him ! I feel sure Mac will like him ! I hope they will get on well together ! Why shouldn’t they ? Of course they will. Dear Mac, it was too bad of me not to have written to him to-day ! To-morrow he shall have a long, long letter.”

“Imagine my really going to the theatre again with you!” she said, aloud. “It doesn’t seem real, does it? I can’t believe it!” And Jessie, when they were fairly *en route*, began to talk a great deal of nonsense, and again feel herself a very important person, and behave as one. Her father laughed at her rubbish, listened to it as if half fascinated; and indeed the finest wit had never seemed so charming to him.

So they went to the theatre and had a box, and saw—for Arthur Bayliss would not risk having his feelings more harrowed than they were already—an opera bouffe.

This was Arthur Bayliss’s first appearance in any place of amusement since his return.

His ideals of right and wrong were the ideals of his boyhood, so he was not long in regretting he had brought the girls to that theatre.

They laughed, innocently enough; when they laughed he scowled.

He had had abundant opportunity of studying the morals of actual life, both on the West Coast of Africa and elsewhere; but his ideal of what morals ought to be was based upon the teaching of his mother and the examples of his late sisters and wife.

Consequently, he was extremely shocked at

everything. The poor dear girls, however, who had had but few opportunities of studying human nature, saw no harm in anything, and enjoyed the novelty of the whole scene very much.

Of course Jessie sat next to her father. Sometimes she turned round suddenly to him, and gave him the full benefit of her eyes and smiles; sometimes he bent towards her and whispered a remark, generally about the abominable dress or coiffure of the period, of which there were only too many examples present; when he did so his action and attitude, seen from a distance, might have been easily mistaken for a lover's; there was about it as little as possible of the paternal. This perhaps, was, under the circumstances, not only excusable, but natural. Arthur Bayliss, in his memory, cherished a fond paternal affection for "his little girl," which he could not immediately transfer—at any rate as to outward form—to the beautiful young woman sitting by his side.

There was a man in the stalls who found the ladies on the stage hardly as interesting as those who were off it. He was rather—indeed very much—struck with Jessie. He began to speculate as to the relationship between her and the man who was with her,

and who paid so little attention to the other girl in the box.

“Should you say they were engaged or just married?” he asked himself; and then he pointed out the couple to his companion, whose eyes had been hitherto mostly on the stage, and who was laughing heartily, and as if he had not a care in the world, as, indeed, at that moment he had not; for all day long he had been telling himself he was the happiest man in the world. It was his last laugh, poor fellow, for many and many a day to come!

With his face still beaming, the young fellow raised his merry eyes to the box. At that moment Arthur Bayliss leaned towards Jessie, Jessie turned with unusual vivacity and looked up into his face with a radiant smile—she was enjoying herself so very much.

“Ah! if Mac could only see me now,” Jessie had said, as she looked at herself in the glass just before starting.

Her wish had come true: the young man over whose honest face rushed a burning flush as he saw those two together was Mac Carruthers.

And she was thinking of him at that very moment; and all the evening long she had been planning that letter she meant to write to him to-morrow; and in spite of all other

emotions and pleasure and the more so the more her feelings were moved, rang through her heart :

“ Together, for ever ; for ever ; together—with Mac—with Mac—with Mac, for ever.”

And Mac was there; and Mac’s face burned and paled, and his heart turned faint and then fierce ; and Jessie sat there smiling by her father’s side, and never knew that one roof covered her and Mac Carruthers.

“ If Mac could only see me ! ”

Ah ! if Jessie could but have known what was to come of his seeing her, how earnestly would she have besought Heaven that Mac might not see her then !

But Mac had seen her ; he had come in with his companion very late, he had seen her and the man with the too lover-like ways, and all his future, and her future with his, was to feel that he had seen her. Poor Mac, how his face burned with fury ! How suddenly his last laugh was stopped !

## CHAPTER XIII.

### JESSIE ON TIP-TOES.

“COME, Jessie,” said Arthur Bayliss, with more authority than he had assumed before towards his newly-found daughter.

Jessie was unused to any authority except her own, for even with her aunt she generally had her own way; that imperious inflection of the voice made her feel that she must obey.

She was just then too happy for resentment, but she did not quite like obedience.

“It’s nearly over,” she said, as if reluctant to leave before the very end.

“We’ve had more than enough of it. Come!”

And he rose. There was nothing but for Alison and Jessie to rise too.

They had both been absorbed in the grotesque fun of the final scene which was then in progress. They looked at the stage and listened to the sparkling music to the very last moment they were allowed to remain. It was the first time they had been in a theatre since

the pantomime days before Captain Bayliss had taken Cauldknowe—it was all very fresh and delightful to them. The stage, I repeat, held them to the last, so that they never saw the young man in the stalls who was frantically trying to make for them. Their box was empty before he reached it.

He was too late. Mac and Jessie were destined not to meet that night.

“I’m infinitely disgusted!” exclaimed Arthur Bayliss, with virtuous indignation, as soon as they were safely in the brougham again.

“ ‘Twas infinitely amusing,” retorted Jessie, laughing.

“I’m shocked to hear you say so,” said her father, sternly. “One excuses that sort of thing in savages, but to come back to one’s own country--that one has fondly believed to be a civilized, Christian country, and find it publicly encouraged, is more disgusting than anything I can imagine.”

“I’m sure, father, I didn’t see anything shocking or wrong; I shouldn’t have laughed at it if I had. It was only very funny,” said Jessie.

“I don’t know what you’ve all been doing while I’ve been away,” said Bayliss. “But it now appears to be proper to flaunt in the faces of decent people whatever used to be con-

sidered most improper. Well, I know for the future I shall take very good care not to come with you to any play I haven't first seen myself."

"I'm sure I shouldn't have thought it was wicked if you hadn't told me, father," said Jessie. "I don't think it's done me much harm ; even now, I don't know what was so shocking in it."

"Bad tone, bad tone, very bad tone ! You, Alison, must feel so, I'm sure."

"Now I come to think of it—yes," said Alison. "But it was very amusing."

Then Arthur Bayliss, who was exceedingly wretched about other matters, attacked the manners and dress of the period with very bitter sarcasm :

"In fact," he said, in conclusion, "you were about the only two girls in the whole place I should care to have been seen with, and I'm not sure that Jessie does not frizzle her hair a great deal too much over her eyes. I remember sitting behind my sister once at a concert and noticing the exquisite neatness of her head. There wasn't a hair awry, it was as smooth as satin ; but gentlewomen were in those days unmistakable gentlewomen ; they might be taken for actresses or milliners, or in fact anything now."

So he growled the whole way down by Tower Hill ; Mrs. Bayliss came to the door to let them in ; but the girls at that time were feeling so suppressed that they hardly dared to tell her how much they had enjoyed themselves.

“ You’ll come upstairs ? ” said Mary Bayliss to her brother-in law.

“ Where is Harbuckle ? ” asked Arthur Bayliss.

“ I suppose he’s up in his den,” Mary returned. “ I’ve seen nothing of him all the evening.”

“ Never turn antiquary, never be an earth-worm or a book-worm, father,” said Jessie, brightly, turning to him, with a whimsical smile.

“ Not I, my darling,” he exclaimed, with that sudden and recognizably pleasant light coming for one instant into his eyes, as he glanced at his daughter’s upturned face.

It faded as quickly as it came.

“ Mary, I think I must speak to Harbuckle for a moment or two. Perhaps I’d better say good-night to you all now.”

“ You’ll be round to breakfast ? ” asked Mary.

“ Well— ” and he hesitated.

“ Oh yes, do come ! ” said the others in chorus.

"Well—I think you'd better not expect me to-morrow. You see," he added, pleasantly, "that now I'm living in the City I am in the position of the proverbial early bird; and of course, you know, it's the duty of the early bird to pick up the first crumb. I'm hoping to secure a particularly fine large crumb to-morrow morning before the other birds get to town. Good-night! Good-night!" And he sprang up a few stairs; then stopped an instant to call back to Mrs. Bayliss: "The girls look very nice, don't they, Mary? They do you credit; they are the only nice girls I've seen this evening, or indeed since I've returned. Good-night!"

Arthur Bayliss slackened his speed before he reached the flight of stairs leading to John Harbuckle's new den.

John Harbuckle heard his foot on the stairs and opened the door.

"Are you at work?" asked Arthur Bayliss, looking towards the open door by which Harbuckle was standing.

"Come in," said the bachelor, slowly measuring out the two syllables.

"Thanks."

"I have been looking out some prints of old London I thought would interest Alison," said John Harbuckle, removing an armful of

papers from the chair that was standing near his own. "Sit down, Bayliss."

"Thanks," Bayliss repeated, taking the proffered chair, while John Harbuckle placed the prints and papers on the top of an already overcrowded bureau, turning his back upon his visitor as he did so.

"What am I to do about my daughter?"

Arthur Bayliss hurried out the words, purposely avoiding the name, "Jessie."

"In what way?" asked John Harbuckle, arranging the papers so that they might not topple over, as they seemed inclined to do, his back turned to Bayliss while he did so.

"She hasn't heard yet of Arnold Birkett. I can't tell her. It's an absolute impossibility! I can't tell her."

"You wish me to do so?"

Two or three loose pages fluttered to the floor. John Harbuckle stooped and picked them up.

"She must know. She'll be coming round to the office. She'll think she ought to live with me. She mustn't come without the others. Yes—if you would tell her you would be doing me a great service."

"How much am I to tell her?" asked John Harbuckle, turning slowly away from the bureau.

"I must leave it to you. As little as possible—not all about her poor mother."

"No, her memory must be kept sacred!"

"I leave it to you. You can understand—you do, I am sure—how anxiously I wish to appear not worse than I am in her eyes. Impress upon her (and I shall be able to second you there) how earnestly I am hoping and striving to do what is possible in the way of reparation."

"I will do my best. You will leave her here then for the present?"

"If you and Mary will allow it. And of course you will let me meet her expenses."

"We will take up that subject another time," said John Harbuckle, curtly.

"You will tell her to-morrow? I am anxious to have it settled at once."

"To-morrow, if possible. You are sure you can't tell her yourself? It would be better if you could, far better."

"I cannot; that is I might be laid up again for a fortnight if I did; and I can't afford that just now."

"Very well; I will do it."

"Thank you, Harbuckle. It will be a service I could ask of no other man."

"I regret you did not ask my help

years ago ; but sorrow is useless now. Are you going ? Good-night."

They shook hands very gravely, without any warmth or either side ; for although Arthur Bayliss would have been glad to put much gratitude into his grasp, he felt it would meet with no response—and then they parted coldly ; but could those men have been compelled to answer truly to the question, "Who is the one man in the world in whom you take the deepest interest ?" their answer would have been : "Arthur Bayliss"—"John Harbuckle."

That night Arthur Bayliss avoided Catherine Court as he returned to his rooms. John Harbuckle, although his eyes were dry, wept long and bitterly in his heart.

Yet the following morning he was glad when he saw the two girls together at breakfast, and thought that Jessie was to be spared to them a little longer.

There was a note for Jessie that morning, as there had been every morning since she had been in London ; but to-day it must have been a more delightful note than usual, so rosy and happy she looked.

We are permitted to know the contents of that note ; but although we might use our liberty, I think we ought to respect Mac's terms of endearment ; so we will leave them

all out. Of course, neither Mac nor Jessie would have liked our profane eyes to rest upon those sacred epithets which a stranger's glance must needs in some fashion rob of their charm. But neither Mac nor Jessie would have cared for all the world's knowing the special cause for gladness which had made the writer, to quote his own words, "the happiest being in creation." Poor Mac ! He was miserable enough by the time those written words of his were making Jessie Bayliss the happiest girl in the City of London !

"Expect me as the clock strikes eleven!" wrote Mac. "We are going through to Paris. It is quite a sudden move. I have persuaded him to let me have a day in London, on purpose to see you. I have so much to talk to you about that I must have a long day to get through it in. You won't object, will you? Donaldson and I are getting on splendidly together. Nothing could well suit me better. I see Hope writ very large on everything. Remember, at eleven precisely to-morrow."

"To-morrow! which means, of course, to-day," said Jessie. "To-day is the to-morrow of yesterday! How glad I am I did not send that note. And what a sweet day it is! A perfect, perfect day! And Mac's to be here at eleven! Exactly as the clock strikes eleven!"

I must make the place look very charming ; and myself too ! Dear old Mac ! It is nine now ! Only two hours, two very busy hours that will go by quickly, and exactly as the bugles sound at eleven there'll be Mac ! Punctual?—of course he'll be punctual ! The idea of Mac's not being punctual when he's coming to see me."

And in her own mind Jessie Bayliss began that "me" with a very large capital—a capital M that was just precisely of the very same size as the letter that stood first in Mac.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ELEVEN PRECISELY.

A BONDED carman, whose van was standing before the door, sent up to request an interview with Mr Harbuckle ("the guvnor," he called him) at the very minute when Jessie, having read her letter, was about to announce the wonderful news that Mac was coming at eleven.

John Harbuckle therefore went downstairs at once; the girls had finished breakfast before he returned, and Mary, who had had a grumbling letter from her tenant at Cauldknowe, was so full of her own affairs that she forgot to mention Jessie's at all; so John Harbuckle began business that day without hearing of Mac's expected visit.

"Now Alison," said Jessie, all the housewife brightly dawning in her dewy hazel eyes, "now, Alison, there's a great deal to be done. We must go and drive Auntie up to ordering a much better lunch than yesterday's. We must take all these plants out into the yard

and wash them ; we must have a regular fight against dust and smuts ; you must go out and buy a great heap of flowers, and altogether we must freshen up the place a bit ; for it's looking rather dingy ; and really it's next to impossible to keep things clean here. Come along, let us get out those big blue jars into the yard, to begin with."

So down they both went to the landing and carefully inspected the broad-leaved plants, and then carried them out into the little triangular space hemmed in by high and smoke-begrimed walls, where they diligently sponged the india-rubber plants and aspodistræ.

It was a pretty sight to see those two girls at work in that little enclosure.

It was a great pity uncle John did not happen to know they were there ; but he was a good deal occupied that morning, and had other things to think of.

Presently, while Jessie was re-arranging most of the furniture and knick-knacks in the drawing-room, Alison, obedient to her cousin's commands (and an engaged girl who is expecting her lover is an imperious despot, whose sway no unengaged girl would dare to question ; Alison, too, was meek and ready to oblige even to a fault), first went out and

lavished an unheard of sum upon cut flowers, and then was driven out again, although the day was getting more than warm, to buy a fine new fern for the drawing-room table.

The drawing-room, by-the-bye, was now glorious in new carpet and curtains, and had an odour of oriental incense hovering about it, instead of the smell of varnish, as in the days when John Harbuckle and his faithful Robbins used to work there.

By the time all these arrangements had been completed, by the time the neatest of Sarah Janes had been compelled to put on her snowiest cap and apron, by the time Jessie had afresh fluffed up her hair and changed her dress and made Alison tidy, by that time it was so nearly eleven that Jessie took her knitting into the drawing-room and sat down on the window seat to wait three or four minutes for Mac's coming.

She sat where she could see, by getting very close to the open window, a little piece of the road along which Mac was to come.

“He is in Tower Street by this time,” she said; “I’ve half a mind to go and meet him. But no, it won’t do! one must maintain a certain amount of dignity. They are always far too conceited, it never does to let them know quite how fond one is of them. Dear

old Mac has perhaps as little of that sort of nonsense about him as any man can have ; but it wouldn't do ; indeed, I'm not quite certain whether I haven't let him have his own way too easily ; but then I really am very fond of Mac, and he's had so many other worries. I wonder, now, is he turning round the corner by Barking Alley ? ”

And Jessie put her head out of the window as far as she safely could.

“ Two minutes to eleven ; I thought by his note he meant to be punctual to the moment. I don't see him anywhere, perhaps he has come the other way ; perhaps he is the other side of the warehouses where I can't see him.”

Passers-by were looking at her ; she drew in her head.

“ One minute to eleven.”

She stealthily approached the window again and again looked along the road.

“ He's evidently not going to be quite punctual,” she said, “ I thought he would be. Perhaps there is a block outside Cannon Street, if he has come by train ; or he's in a cab somewhere and can't get on.”

Bugles from the Tower. The earliest clock striking eleven

She put her head out of the window again.

No sign of Mac. The latest clock struck eleven.

"He shouldn't have made so much fuss about being to the moment, he should have said 'about eleven,'" thought Jessie, while a horrible pain shot through her heart.

Perhaps he would not come at all, it seemed to her that disappointment would be unbearable.

"It's ridiculous to be disappointed so soon when the streets are in such a state," said Jessie. But she felt suddenly dull and lonely. Alison had discretely kept away ; Jessie went in search of her.

"Was there a great block in East Cheap when you were out just now, Alie?" she asked.

"Frightful," said Alison ; "I saw several men get out of cabs and walk."

"Ah! then I daresay that is what's keeping Mac late."

"Why it's not five minutes past yet ! He is sure to be here directly."

"I can't bear to be kept waiting one instant," said Jessie, petulantly. "If I'd have been Mac I'd have come half an hour too early and have waited about until the hour was just going to strike!"

"Jessie, you forget Mac isn't quite a free man!"

“ How can you remind me of such a thing ! What an abominable idea ! ”

“ Well, but it’s true ! Business is business, you know ! ”

“ No, I don’t know ; besides, isn’t there a telegraph office in London ? ”

“ Well, perhaps his interesting companion has had a fit, and Mac is sending wildly for doctors.”

“ There goes the quarter past ! Oh ! Alison, look out of the window, will you ? Be careful : not too far ! I wouldn’t have him see either of us looking out for him upon any account ! Is he coming ? ”

Poor Jessie, she tried hard to control her voice, but it trembled.

Oh ! this first keen pang of disappointment, how was it to be borne ? Alison had shaken her head ; Mac was not yet in sight.

“ Did you look at the date of his note ; perhaps to-morrow means to-day’s to-morrow ; no, it couldn’t well mean that either. It was written in Scotland, wasn’t it ? ” suggested Alison, quite touched by Jessie’s evident distress.

“ Yes, yes ! There’s no mistake about the time he meant. I shall go out. Why should I wait in ? ”

“ Well but, you know, all sorts of circumstances quite unforeseen ”—began Alison.

“Oh, how I hate waiting!” exclaimed Jessie, and she retired to the drawing-room sofa, where she sat listening to every sound. There was the grinding of the heavy wheels, the noise of the City without, the summer breeze in the lace curtain near at hand, a street boy’s shout now and again, the tread of feet beneath the window; the half-hour chimed—but no Mac came.

Jessie turned her face to the wall and felt she could not endure it.

Yet she lay still, neither speaking to the others when they came in, nor crying when they left. The three-quarters slowly came and passed, the long minutes dragged by, the bugles sounded from the Tower—the City clocks struck twelve.

Jessie sprang up and went into the dining-room :

“Alison, we’ll go out! Come at once,” she said, her usually pretty voice grown as set and hard as her features now looked.

They went upstairs and dressed.

“We won’t go towards St. Paul’s, Alie, we might meet him. Let us go some other way—along Fenchurch Street, perhaps?” said Jessie, as the two girls were on the doorstep. “No—there comes uncle John, I don’t want to see him; come a few steps the other way.”

But uncle John was already quite near. He and Alison had already recognized each other.

"He wishes to speak to us, I think," said Alison, and went towards him, Jessie following close behind.

"Going anywhere in particular?" asked uncle John.

"No, merely for a walk," said Alison. "It is so fine; and in the city there's always a shady side."

"I rather wanted to speak to Jessie for a minute," said uncle John, uneasily. "What do you say? Can you spare me a minute?"

"As many as you like!" returned Jessie, as if minutes, hours, days, were now alike valueless to her.

John Harbuckle glanced at her for an instant and perceived that there was something wrong.

"Then come into the office," he said, and they walked back together.

"I'll run up and speak to mother," said Alison, "I forgot to ask her if we could do anything for her."

"Yes, do, my dear!" said John Harbuckle, as they re-entered the house.

An elderly clerk was at work in the office; John Harbuckle, however, although he did

not indulge in a luxurious private room, had a counting-house to himself: not indeed furnished with comfortable chairs, after the manner of Arthur Bayliss's room in Fenchurch Avenue, but with an old fashioned high desk, and tall stools to match it.

"Yes, uncle John?" asked Jessie, as he closed the counting-house door.

"You don't look well," said John Harbuckle.

"My head aches," said Jessie, quietly. Then making an effort to appear at ease she perched lightly on one of the high stools.

"Well, uncle John, what is it?" she asked.

"I am afraid I may have to pain you," said John Harbuckle.

"You know why Mac hasn't come?" Jessie asked, with a strange look of sudden terror.

"I didn't know you were expecting him," said John Harbuckle, "were you?"

"He promised to be here at eleven, and now it's past twelve," said Jessie, simply, but very miserably.

"Oh, he'll be here presently! Don't worry yourself about it, he's sure to come. He would have sent if he were not coming; he'll be here directly. It was about your father, Jessie, I wish to speak to you. You know he

has been in very serious trouble, and still has many difficulties to contend with."

"I know," said Jessie, very clearly, but with a slower speech than usual. "I am very sorry, I must try to be all the kinder to him to make up for it."

"Indeed, he'll need all your help," said John Harbuckle, looking not at the slender young figure perched on the high stool, but at a page of an open account book. "A woman can help a man very much, you are too young to know how much."

"I thought I could guess, but perhaps I'm mistaken," said Jessie, a little dryly.

"Don't worry yourself about the young man, he's coming, depend upon it," said uncle John, with a slight smile.

"I'm not worrying myself," said Jessie.

The words had passed her lips before she could realize how untruthful they were.

"Tell me about my father," she went on, nervously.

"There have been some very unhappy circumstances connected with your father's absence," began John Harbuckle; "crooked things it will be a hard task to make straight. There is much that can never be undone. But your father is an honourable man in the main, and with your help, Jessie, he may yet

be able to put himself right, to a certain extent, in the eyes of the world. I am afraid it will not all be pleasant for you."

"I don't care for pleasantness," said Jessie ; "I don't care what I do or what I go without if I can only make him happy again."

"I am afraid neither you nor anyone else will ever be able to do that ; but you may help him to make the best of very sad circumstances. Men, you know, Jessie, look to women to encourage them in doing the difficult right," said John Harbuckle, opening another of the heavy books that lay on the high desk by which he was standing, and peering into it.

"Do they ?" asked Jessie, very softly, and her lips quivered a little. A strange, new feeling of responsibility touched her heart in spite of her distress and annoyance about Mac.

"Do these stronger, larger, rougher beings—these men—do they then depend so much on us ? Is it true ?" she asked herself. "Oh !" almost breaking down with the thoughts, "I did mean to be good to Mac ; I did indeed !"

"Do they ?" replied John Harbuckle. "Ah, Jessie ! the right is very hard for a man to do without some woman's support and sanction ! You see," he went on with a certain wistfulness

in his kindly smile, “you see what persons of importance you are.”

“Yes,” said Jessie, the tears gathering in her eyes, but not falling, “I’ll try to be good, uncle John. Tell me now, what is the matter.”

He never quite knew what he told her, or how he managed to make her understand about Arnold Birkett.

She listened in silence, colouring painfully ; the colour grew hotter and hotter, until she felt the flush on her cheeks burning into them, and the tears had dried in her eyes.

She sat quite still for a minute, when John Harbuckle paused.

“I see it all,” Jessie said, presently, quite quietly ; “I see it all now.” The fire in her cheeks paled and paled, until it died, leaving an ashen hue behind. Then she came down from the high stool and turned towards the door.

John Harbuckle opened it for her. He did not look at her until she had passed him. He followed her into the hall and watched her go up the stone stairs, with one hand pressed against her heart and the other on the balusters, on which she leaned heavily. He watched her until she disappeared behind the baize door.

“Poor child! poor child!” he said ; “I’m

afraid—I'm afraid we've hurt her too much ! I hardly thought she would have taken it so —she must have known a good deal of it all along ! Poor darling, it has crushed her ! ” And after waiting a moment or two he cautiously went upstairs and, having found Alison alone in the drawing-room, told her, under his voice, that Jessie did not seem well.

Alison ran upstairs to the bed-room. The door was locked. She came back at once.

“ It's only about Mac, uncle John,” she said ; “ she's just disappointed, that's all. He's sure to come or send soon. But I'm very sorry ! So nice as she'd made the place look, too ! She'll be better alone. It will be all right when he comes.”

“ Well—perhaps so ; but keep an eye upon her. I didn't like the look of her just now,” and he silently withdrew.

Poor Jessie ! She had gone slowly up the stone stairs and past the broad-leaved plants she had arranged that very morning with such care—never seeing them at all as she passed. Then she had, more slowly and heavily still, laboured up the next flight to her own room, locked the door, and dropped down on the bed, with her face against the pillows, moaning :

“ God ! God ! Do let me die !—oh, do let me die at once ! ”

It was all clear to her now, Mac had heard what she had heard, and Mac had left her; Arnold Birkett had driven him away from her! Mac would never come back to her any more.

Mac was not used to such things; he had never been mixed up with them. He had heard it all, and he was gone.

## CHAPTER XV.

soon ?

IT was a miserable luncheon without Mac and Jessie.

Mrs. Bayliss was grievously disappointed that Mac had not come; disappointed on her own account as well as on Jessie's; for she had taken a good deal of extra trouble about things, and was moreover longing to hear all about Birrendale and her tenants at Cauldknowe.

"What can have happened, mother?" asked Alison, at table.

"I'm almost beginning to fear something serious," returned Mrs. Bayliss. "Mac Caruthers is far too impetuous a young man to be kept from carrying out a plan on which he has set his heart by any trivial hindrance."

"If it had been serious you would have been sure to have heard of it by this time. The most probable cause is that Donaldson has been giving him trouble, and that just at the time he ought to have started Mac was too

much engaged with him either to be able to leave or send. You'll see him here presently with a very simple explanation. In the meanwhile I had better tell you that Jessie's distress is not wholly referable to his absence. I have had to tell her—her father commissioned me to tell her, and I suppose you are to be included—a piece of intelligence that has, together with this morning's disappointment, been too much for her."

Then he told them about Arnold Birkett.

They heard it in silence.

"Poor Jessie! No wonder she is so distressed," said Alison, after a long pause; but neither Alison nor her mother saw the connection between that unwelcome news and Mac's absence in the light in which Jessie saw it.

John Harbuckle was indisposed to talk or to discuss matters. He said what he had to say in the fewest words possible, and then went to his work again, Jessie's figure, which had suddenly looked as limp and powerless as if it had not one bone left in it, and the ashen grey of her face, haunting him all the way down to the East India Docks and back again.

The little household seemed totally disorganised.

Mrs. Bayliss sighed, sat with her hands folded, doing nothing, thinking, half with envy,

of that other woman who had sacrificed herself and her conscience for her husband's sake, and wondering what she would have done had it been her James instead of his brother.

"Her conscience killed her! I was right; I said it had. Would mine have killed me?" she asked herself the question, but her mind wandered away from the answer.

Alison, who usually had plenty to occupy her, could find nothing all the long afternoon except knitting to do. Books, Old London, the Tower, these things were not interesting to her to-day; her mind was too busy, and too oppressed.

She sat by the window, knitting, conscious that things were going wrong, wondering why Mac did not come, and watching every postman and telegraph boy, she saw; hoping that at least there would be some message she could take up to Jessie.

But the little Japanese tea table was set, and the tea made in one of uncle John's Wedgwood pots, the wearisome afternoon was waning. Alison once more looked out of the window towards Barking Alley; the plane-trees were brown and dusty, the great space opposite the warehouses was growing empty, the working day was nearing its close, but

there was no Mac anywhere, nor any message from him.

"It is very strange," said Alison to her mother. "Can he have suddenly disappeared like uncle Arthur? Are we to lose him, too, for eight years? I'm so sorry for Jessie! I had better take her up some tea."

She poured out a cup, and took it upstairs.

"Jessie dear, do open the door, there's a darling!" she called, after she had gently tapped at the door.

She waited for an instant; there was no sound, no reply.

"Jessie! Jessie!" called Alison, "do speak to me!"

Alison listening anxiously, thought she heard something like:

"Go away, please; I'm all right."

So she went downstairs again, feeling still more oppressed and troubled than before, but she little knew what a dreadful sense of the reality of her distress the sound of her voice had brought to Jessie.

Jessie had been lying there, so dazed, so stunned by the sudden blow, conscious that something terrible had happened, praying that she might be allowed to die at once, yet half hoping it was all but a hideous dream, until she had heard Alison calling; until the

fear in Alison's voice, as she repeated her name, told her that her cousin, her family, all the world knew what had happened.

It was so terrible : the blow had struck her, but she had not died ; there was the dreadful world of kind, pitying relatives to be faced ; there they were calling, " Jessie ! Jessie ! " and the earth would not swallow her up and hide her from them ; God would not let her die !

" And I was so fond of Mac ! And he—yes, I'm sure of it—he was so fond of me ! And now it's all over, it's all over ! He has heard what I have heard ! he is afraid of being mixed up with it. And if he hadn't stopped away—stopped away ! how could he ? Is it possible he could be so mean ? I can't believe it of him ! And yet what else can it be ?—it must be that ! But if he had come, I should have had to give him up ! I must have given him up ! I couldn't be a disgrace to him !—no, no ! I couldn't be a disgrace to him ! I couldn't let him be mixed up with such things ; but he ought to have known that ! he ought to have trusted me ! Oh, he's been too cruel ; and I was so happy this morning ! I ought to have known something was going to happen when I was so happy, it is always so with me. Oh, Mac ! Mac ! Mac ! and I was so fond of you ; I meant to be so good to you !

I did, indeed—and—and I should have given you up for your good—only, only for your good—when I heard of that disgrace ; I would not have let it touch you—it would have broken my heart, but I would have done it ! you've been too cruel, there was no need to be so cruel ; I would have given you up ! ” And Jessie wept and sobbed, and wept and sobbed, until she could weep no more. Then she lay for a while quiet and exhausted, and presently fell asleep, “ sleeping for sorrow.”

Another post came, but it brought no tidings of Mac.

Jessie awoke.

The working day closed. Alison, restless, and tired of the tedious hours, stole upstairs again : “ Jessie, darling ! do let me in ; I really must come in ! ” she begged again, tapping at the door. She waited for a minute and then heard the lock turning. She opened the door. Jessie was slowly recrossing the room to the washing-stand, where she had been sponging her face.

“ No letter has come ? ” Jessie asked, quietly.

“ No,” said Alison, with extreme reluctance.

“ There will not be one,” said Jessie, with a hard distinctness most unnatural to her. “ It is all over.” She had evidently been packing up all the letters she had had

from Mac, when Alison had interrupted her. She went to the toilet-table; and took up several which lay there, and put them one on the other very deliberately.

“Jessie! you are not going to send them back; that’s absurd!” exclaimed Alison, looking at the letters.

“You will allow me to know my own business,” said Jessie, coldly, adding another letter to the pile.

“Yes, yes, of course; but wait, there may—indeed I think there must be an accident.”

“There is no accident,” said Jessie, with decision.

“No accident! What do you mean?” asked Alison. “You can’t surely think that Mac, who is the soul of honour, deficient though he may be in some things, would wilfully disappoint you? That is too wildly improbable.”

“I have ceased to believe in honour among men,” said Jessie, bitterly; “I believed in Mac with all my heart.”

“Then you might have more confidence in him,” said Alison; to whom there was still no connection between “Arnold Birkett” and Mac’s non-appearance.

“I am the better judge of that,” said Jessie.

Alison said nothing, she changed her morning dress for the one she wore of an evening.

Jessie felt, with a horrible tightening of the tension of her nerves, that she, too, must change her dress, and appear as if, since she sat with the others at breakfast, all her life had not been ruined.

She felt it—it reminded her of that turning the screw of the rack, the thought of which had often made her shudder when she had looked at the Tower.

“Then they racked limbs; now they rack hearts,” she said to herself, taking up all the letters, and throwing them into the desk she kept them in, the letters she had kissed and fondled so tenderly.

She locked them up, changed her dress, arranged her hair and the details of her toilet as carefully as ever; the set look in her face brought tears into Alison’s eyes, but Jessie had none in hers.

“Have you told her?” asked Arthur Bayliss, under his voice, coming into John Harbuckle’s office as the books were being put away. He looked haggard and careworn, and altogether jaded.

“I have,” returned Harbuckle, turning the lock of his iron safe.

“How did she take it?” Bayliss asked, nervously.

“Badly. She was expecting the young man

from Birrendale this morning, but he didn't come. I didn't know or I would not have told her to-day ; the two things together were more than she could stand. We've hurt her very much."

"Where is she ?" asked Bayliss with sudden agitation.

"I believe she has been in her room ever since."

"I must go to her," said Bayliss.

"Will it be wise ?" asked John Harbuckle.

"I must go ;" and without ceremony he ran upstairs.

"Mary, I hear Jessie is—is not well ; which is her room ?" he said, meeting Mary Bayliss, on the landing.

"I'll go and tell her you're here."

"No, no—I'll go. She'll come to me."

Mary pointed out the room, he hurried up.

"Jessie, darling ! are you ill ?" he called, his voice trembling beyond control.

Jessie's voice was perfectly clear as she answered.

"No, go into the drawing-room. I will come to you."

He went into the drawing-room ; Mrs. Bayliss saw him there, but was wise enough to leave him alone.

He walked about restlessly for a minute or two, and then Jessie came in.

He stopped and looked at her as she slowly moved towards him.

Her face was pallid, her eyelids heavy, her beautiful lips as pale as if they had been chiselled by a sculptor. He was frightened, almost terror-stricken, he could hardly go to meet her.

She came nearer, he moved a step or two, he took her in his arms, bent over her and kissed her tenderly.

“ My darling, you have been pained ! I was obliged to let you know or I would have kept it from you,” he whispered.

“ I have been pained,” she said, distinctly, slipping away from him.

“ I am sorry your Mac should not have come to-day. He will be here presently,” said Jessie’s father, soothingly.

“ He will never be here any more,” said Jessie, with calm despair, turning away.

“ Don’t think that ! Don’t think that ! Of course he’ll come!—why shouldn’t he ? ”

“ He didn’t know I was Arnold Birkett’s daughter when we were engaged ; he knows it now,” said Jessie, slowly and clearly, but without turning to her father.

She sat down at some distance from him—

her head still averted. Her father, quite unprepared for this turn, was utterly staggered.

"Knows! How can he know?" he asked, after a long pause.

"I am sure he does," said Jessie; "that is why he has not come."

"If so—he's a cad, a cad you're well rid of!" exclaimed Arthur Bayliss. The contemptuous word and tone roused Jessie. She came to her father with bowed head and outstretched arms: 'I belong to you! I belong to you now!' she sobbed, her head sinking on his shoulder. "And—and"—with tears—"I'll be kind to you—I will, indeed; I've nobody else to be good to now!"

He led her to the sofa and let her weep on.

"Why did I come back to trouble you?" he asked, presently.

"Don't—don't say that; I am glad you've come, indeed, indeed I am!" cried Jessie.

"I'm not," said he. "My darling, don't cry so—you'll hurt yourself! Look up—look up, dear. I've had a good day; I've made a great deal of money, more than I ever made before in one day. If I could make as much every day all would soon be righted—all that can be righted. He doesn't know, depend upon it, he doesn't! Don't quite break my

heart, Jessie ; look up—encourage me a little, Jessie ; it will all be righted ! ”

“ Soon ? ” she asked, raising her head.

“ Soon ? ”—and the sight of her quivering lips made his own tremble—“ soon ? My child, how can I tell ? ”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE BAKING OF THE OAT CAKES.

ALISON awoke that night to find Jessie sitting by the window.

“Do try to sleep!” she said.

“I can’t; I shall never sleep any more,” replied the voice from the window.

“But you might be resting,” suggested Alison.

“I can rest nowhere,” Jessie said, neither wildly or tearfully, but with quiet sadness.

Alison said no more, she lay still, praying.

Alison, not being in love with Mac, had more faith in him than Jessie had. This was strange, but it is a thing that often happens. Jealousies and suspicions are born of affection. Alison felt that it would be contrary to Mac’s nature to do a base or cruel thing; Jessie, since she had heard of Arnold Birkett, had believed that Mac had left her—that Mac had feared to be mixed up with discreditable affairs and had left her.

In the silence of the summer night, as she

sat there by the window in the moonlight, there gradually came into her mind—not very distinctly, but with profound solemnity—the feeling that *Mac had gone out of existence.*

She tried to think of him as somewhere, but could not.

“Perhaps he’s dead—perhaps, while I have been thinking cruel thoughts about him, he is lying dead.”

But her mother was dead, yet she always felt that mother was somewhere in heaven ; she came to her in dreams. And then, it may have been that the moon-light, streaming on to the floor, brought back that stormy night at Birrendale when she had dreamed of her mother’s smile—she thought of the placid happiness that had touched her then, and felt that if Mac were gone away to that mysterious land, he would be free to make her know by some slight token that he still thought of her there.

To-night she only felt that Mac was gone ; gone completely, as if he had ceased to exist, as if he had been blotted out of creation.

Not crudely, as I have been obliged to put it down, did Jessie feel this, but they weighed heavily on her mind those words :

“Mac is gone.”

The wheels of time seemed to stand still for

her, so slowly they turned ; but, imperceptible as was their movement, at length the day dawned, the early toilers began their work, the light carts rattled over the stones, the strong horses laboured up the hill with the heavy vans, and Jessie, tired out, crept back to Alison and fell asleep.

Yet she awoke about the usual time. Hope sprang up afresh ; there might be a letter. She dressed, and went downstairs. There was no letter.

Her father came round to breakfast. She tried to appear cheerful ; but they all looked dreadful to her ; she fancied that all were thinking :

“ Poor Jessie ! Mac’s left her.”

Then came more waiting, and more waiting ; and then again it struck eleven, then it was a quarter past.

“ Yesterday,” thought Jessie, remembering how impossible it had seemed to wait even a minute, “ yesterday I felt I couldn’t wait one instant, now I know I can ; but what pain ! ah, what pain ! ”

Her father came in to lunch—to dinner—he spent the evening there. She sat with him for an hour in the gardens of the square—an interminable hour to her.

The last fortnight had been excessively hot.

Mrs. Bayliss had for some days been thinking about the sea-side, for the front rooms of the house were now obliged to be furnished with out-side blinds, and were even then oppressive. The plane tree that stands on the site of the gallows tree of the bad old days was dusty and brown ; the broad pavement in front of the Trinity House glared white in the heat.

“John,” said Mrs. Bayliss to her brother, when they were alone, while Jessie and her father were out of doors, “under the circumstances, the best thing we can do is to take her down to the sea for a change.”

“I’m afraid she’ll take her trouble with her,” said John ; “however, as far as I’m concerned, I should be very willing for you to take the girls. Her father may, however, have something to say in the matter.”

“Oh, I can manage that. He will be sure to take my advice,” said Mrs. Bayliss. “It will be the best thing for her.”

“I am not so certain,” said John ; “but it is no longer a question for me to decide, you must ask her father.”

“She wants change—both the girls want change,” said Mrs. Bayliss.

“Indeed, mother, I don’t,” said Alison. “I shall pine away if you take me out of the

City. And as for its being hot here, why there's always a shady side to all the streets ; and no place can be interesting to me in comparison with London, east of Westminster, where, I'll admit freely, the interest pretty nearly ceases."

" You're a genuine Harbuckle, Alison ; there's not much of the Bayliss in you, unfortunately. I'm afraid you're more like your grandparents——"

" Why 'afraid,' mother ?" interrupted Alison ; " they were all very good people."

" Oh yes, of course, very good people, and I was very fond of them," said their daughter, testily ; " but they had no—I can hardly express what I mean, there was something lacking in them, they had no social ambition, no—in fact they were content to be simple citizens. The Baylisses are so different. That's what I like in Jessie, she is such a thorough Bayliss; I do wish, Alison, that you were. I'm sure I don't know what is to become of you !"

" Oh, Mary, you needn't trouble yourself about Alison's future ! But I think, if Jessie's father will consent to it, you'd better all of you go to the sea-side for a little while," said uncle John.

" Well, when will you be able to take us John ?" asked the widow.

"*Take you*, my dear! That is quite another thing. I'll come down and see you from Saturday until Monday, if you like, but as for staying a whole week at the seaside, why, I should be dead by the end of it," said John Harbuckle.

"Is it possible for Arthur Bayliss to spare the time? It's so dull alone," said Mary.

"He can't get away just now. There's a run on shellac. Mincing Lane's gone mad. I hope Bayliss will make his fortune. He couldn't possibly leave just now."

"Was there ever a business man who *could* get away when the women of his family wanted him?" asked Mary, "No! My poor James was always ready to take us anywhere! And I must say I hate going about alone."

"But there are the girls to go with you," suggested John, mildly.

"The girls!" retorted the widow; "I love them dearly, but how can I make companions of girls? I've always been used to the attention of men," and her tone implied, "I can't get accustomed to doing without it."

"I am sorry, Mary," said John; "but really I can only offer you the choice of staying here or going with the girls."

"That's a subterfuge quite unworthy of you, John!" exclaimed Mary, with some temper.

“Not at all!” said he, quietly.

“Why don’t you speak out the honest truth,” said Mary, with a sneer; “why don’t you say that we bore you, that you couldn’t tolerate our society for a whole week!”

“Such an assertion would be so much more than the truth that it would be like falsehood. Not your society, my dear, but the sea-side for a week would be the infliction I could not reasonably hope to survive,” said John Harbuckle.

“There, there, John!—say no more about it! We won’t go, that’s decided! We’ll stay here and be suffocated! I thought that you, at least, would have had some feeling for poor Jessie if for no one else!” and Mary Bayliss took up the evening paper and began to read it with great avidity.

There was something peculiarly irritating just then in the expression Mrs. Bayliss managed to put into her colourless eye-lashes as she read.

John Harbuckle could not stand it, so retired to his den; but, not being able to settle to work, he and Alison went out on an exploring expedition.

Retributive justice, however, tracked down the nefarious old bachelor; he had to suffer for his atrocious conduct in disregarding his

sister's wishes. That very evening the weather changed. The British Isles were visited by one of those sudden atmospheric depressions which have of late years recurred so frequently that we now expect to be wearing our warmest winter clothing for a few weeks in the middle of summer.

That sudden and extreme change was accompanied by heavy rains and a violent gale.

John Harbuckle, the man who refused to take his sister to the sea-side, had to go down to Deal all by himself, to look after a ship that had been badly damaged.

Some one was glad he had to go—that some one was Jessie Bayliss. He had carefully avoided the slightest expression of pity or anxiety, but she felt them all the same. It was a relief to her that he was obliged to go.

Perhaps, too, it was a relief to him ; perhaps, after all, he was glad to be called away ; but if so, what becomes of the retributive justice theory ? In which, it may be added, Mrs. Bayliss implicitly believed.

It was Wednesday when Jessie had expected Mac at eleven precisely. The remainder of the week was spent, more or less, in misery by the greater proportion of the inhabitants of the British Isles. Invalids who had been

lingering on during the fine weather, infants, and old people dropped off; dyspeptics sank into abject wretchedness.

Shellac, which had been running up at a wonderful rate for some time past, fell as suddenly as the barometer; not that the weather had anything to do with it, but that it so happened the two falls were simultaneous. The last thing John Harbuckle heard before he left town was that one of the speculators had committed suicide.

The girls could not go out. They worked away at winter socks (for they knitted as quickly as if born north of the Tweed), Jessie's to be for her father, and Alison's for uncle John. But the time dragged on slowly, and still more slowly, until the only two things that seemed certain were that the end of the week would never come, and that it would never leave off raining.

On Friday afternoon, Alison was sitting by one rain-washed window, knitting and reading, and Jessie was at the other window knitting, with a book upon her lap, but not reading, only thinking: when would the horrible suspense end, when would this dull pain give place to sharper agony, or sudden joy; when should she know the worst?

Mrs. Bayliss had been hemming some of

those muslin bands which form so conspicuous a part of the insignia of widowhood, but had fallen asleep in the arm-chair, under the very eye of the grandfather with the Lord Mayor's collar of S.S. Within the room there was not the slightest sound, except the hurried ticking of the old-fashioned clock, with the mahogany roof shaped like a pagoda.

Presently Jessie felt a sob rising that nothing except the promptest action could conquer. She sprang up, put down the book and knitting, went to the other window and nestled against Alison, as if for warmth.

“Isn’t it wet? Birrendale wasn’t wetter,” Jessie said under her voice.

Alison looked out of the wet window, to the wet trees, the wet vans, the wet carmen, the wet Tower beyond, dimly seen through the drenching rain.

“Cold and grey and wet, oh, how wet!” Alison said, shuddering.

“There’s only one thing that I could really enjoy,” said Jessie, in a more natural voice, as if suddenly returning to her own self; “I could enjoy sconing and oat-caking. Couldn’t you now? What a comfort it used to be at Cauldknowe! I do miss the kitchen fire so much! I suppose you couldn’t beard that

lioness in her den for me, could you?" she added, with an appealing little whine.

"What *couldn't* I do for you!" exclaimed Alison. "Name that thing."

"You were always a tackler and a backer up!" said Jessie. "I shall always give you credit for those two great qualities. Will you tackle that lioness?—will you back me up if I invade the 'department,' as uncle John calls it? I can't stand this any longer; I shall cry directly, if you don't take me into the kitchen."

"Not another word!" said Alison, putting her finger mysteriously to her lips. "Victory or Westminster Abbey!" and drawing Jessie's arm within her own, she marched boldly to the attack.

But in a very few minutes the brave girls returned crest-fallen. The lioness had shown more teeth and tongue than they had been prepared for; they had been shamefully routed. The noise of their precipitate retreat aroused the slumberer in the arm-chair.

Mrs. Bayliss heard their indignant complaints. She recognised the opportunity for which she had for some days been waiting. She arose, struck one decisive blow; the tyrant met a tyrant's fate: that very evening they all went to bed, free, but cookless. Mrs. Robbins's third successor had departed.

Saturday, a day of brown fog, found them busy, but comparatively happy, for even Jessie began to think hopefully, as she deftly kneaded up the oatmeal in that simple primitive way, so unattainable to the Londoner, even Jessie began to fancy that if Mac really cared for her, which she thought must be the case, and if she really cared for him, of which she had now not the slightest doubt, why, then, things would come right after all. In the meanwhile her father had never tasted oat-cakes of her own making, and so—throwing a “quarter” carefully off her pretty hands on to the hot girdle—and so it was pleasant to be able to be free to make them once more.

“How very strange I should be feeling that anything is pleasant,” Jessie said, returning to the board for another quarter-cake.

“And I think you’ll say I’ve built up just a lovely arrangement for ‘firing them,’ ” said Alison, who had been engaged in front of the stove for some minutes. (Oat-cake, you must know, is first baked on the girdle, and then slightly browned in front of the fire.) “You bake, Jessie, and I’ll fire. Look, what with this hanger and these two flat irons, I’ve an excellent substitute for that brander we were stupid enough to leave behind us at Cauldknowe. Now, have you some baked? There,

what could be better? What, they won't stand up, won't they? But they shall. I'll wrastle with them—as McQuade used to say—and I'll conquer them; never fash yourself, my dear!"

"That's capital," said Jessie, laughing. ("How very curious I should laugh," she said to herself.) "Here, Alison, these on the girdle are done now; but this meal doesn't seem just like the meal we had in Birrendale. How very strange I should be taking an interest in these things," Jessie added, inwardly.

"Now, Alison, they're all done to a turn. I wonder, will my father be just delighted with them?—Aren't they neat now?" she asked, quite gleefully, as Alison stood the last quarter up on end to cool.

Jessie spoke gleefully, but Alison looked rather sharply at her, and moved a step nearer to her.

"And how very strange it is that I should be quite happy again, and not care for Mac in the least! How very, very strange!" said Jessie to herself, and suddenly all the world grew blank and her head sank upon Alison's shoulder; Jessie had fainted away.

END OF VOL. II.



# THE TOWER GARDENS.

A Novel.

BY

LIZZIE ALDRIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "BY LOVE AND LAW;" "THE WORLD SHE AWOKE IN;  
"THE OLD ABBOT'S ROAD," &c.

"Now was there made, fast by the Touris wall,  
A g'arden fair."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE  
TOWER GARDENS.

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CHAPTER I.

ALISON IN HER ELEMENT.

BY Sunday morning the winds and rain had abated, a cold leaden sky hung over the City, a cold drizzle filled its deserted streets.

On that dull, grey Sunday, Arthur Bayliss awoke earlier than usual to a consciousness of extreme wretchedness. He rang his bell furiously, but on Sundays Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, his caretakers, were not early risers ; so he had to ring several times and wait long before John Harbuckle's Mr. Robbins' brother William, who answered to the name of Jim, made his appearance ; and longer still before Mrs. Jim had made that cup of tea without which Arthur Bayliss felt that on such a morning he could not face life.

This prolonged waiting afflicted Mr. Bayliss with the most heartrending sorrow as well as with the direst impatience. When at last Mr. Jim Robbins appeared, he heard a few remarks which showed that absence from his native land had not affected Mr. Bayliss's power of using the vernacular.

After that outburst of wrath, Arthur Bayliss felt quite spent, and as if he should sink through the floor ; but the remembrance of Jessie's face, worn and pale as he had seen it last night, roused him to action.

He had not heard of the fainting fit. Jessie, poor child, as soon as she could speak, had begged so piteously,

“Don’t tell my father! Don’t tell my father!” Her anxiety had been so wholly to spare him distress, that the others had been obliged to say nothing. Jessie, however, had looked so unlike the bright girl he had taken to the theatre, that it was but natural her father should that morning wish to see her again as early as possible.

Arthur Bayliss had therefore a sufficient reason for getting up and going out. He knew it was about the worst thing he could do ; but he was in the state of body and mind in which a man is compelled to make a martyr of himself, and—although tortures would not

make him admit as much—of every one else. So that a very slight cause would have made him feel that it was as important for him to go round to Trinity Square as if his life or Jessie's depended upon it. He dressed himself with great difficulty in his warmest clothes and went out.

It is inconceivable that anyone in London that morning was really comfortable, certainly Mrs. James Bayliss was not.

She was cold, indeed shivering, but she looked at the Japanese umbrella and the pots of ferns in the dining-room grate, and could not resolve to have them removed ; it was so absurd to light a fire in July.

" Of course in the North we had our fires laid all the year round, but in London it is too ridiculous ! " she said.

" Oh, Auntie," said Jessie, shuddering with cold, " my father will be here soon and he's sure to want a fire. Do have one lighted ! "

" Well, but you'll be going to the Temple or the Abbey ; we'll have one lighted after church," said Mrs. Bayliss, who did not like to give in. " Really you ought to be a little heroic ! One should learn how to stand such trifles ! "

" I don't like trifling discomforts," said Jessie, " they wear you out, and then you haven't

strength to bear heavy troubles. I don't like them at all. Why shouldn't we be comfortable?"

But Mrs. Bayliss was resolute.

Presently her brother-in-law arrived.

"Good heavens, Mary! What an ice-house!" were his first words. "Jessie, are you mad that you're sitting in this well? What do you mean by it?"

"Arthur! you're very ill!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, noticing his sunken eyes and yellow skin.

He answered by lying down on the sofa with his face to the wall, in an attitude of physical prostration and mental despair that frightened Jessie, and softened her aunt's heart.

Mrs. Bayliss was too experienced a woman to be alarmed; but she was touched; for it would seem that the sight of a man lying with his face to the wall appeals strongly to feminine sympathies.

Queen Jezebel, we may remember, was by no means a tender-hearted woman, yet when her lord came home and laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, she at once set her wicked wits to work to help him.

Men sometimes take a mean advantage of this well-known feminine susceptibility. A sensible woman however, is careful to discriminate between real suffering and a fit of sulks, and

while for the first she has nothing but tenderness, the second she leaves to cure itself, lest, at some unguarded moment, she should be tempted to throw something hard at the recumbent head.

There was no question as to the reality of Arthur Bayliss's misery. With half a glance Mrs. Bayliss recognized the symptoms, for in a milder form her late husband had had similar attacks.

It was almost amusing to see how she changed at once; how thoroughly she understood her business, and threw herself heart and soul into it. In less time than it has taken me to write this page, she and the girls had the Japanese umbrella and ferns out of the grate, a fine fire roaring in it, the sofa drawn up as close as possible to that fire, and Arthur Bayliss snugly tucked up in an eider-down quilt, and Jessie sitting by his side, looking pale and very much alarmed.

Then they all subsided into a profound quiet. Mrs. Bayliss took up her station with her feet on the fender and turned to the Psalms for the day; Jessie sat quite still with one hand on the quilt; but there seemed nothing for Alison to do. She was not particularly anxious; her father's attacks had always passed off in a few hours, so she thought that

as she did not seem to be wanted by anyone she might as well go to church ; and she whispered as much to her mother.

Mrs. Bayliss, who was now in a most delightful temper, nodding assent, Alison stole softly from the room, shutting the door behind her very noiselessly.

As Alison went with hushed step upstairs, an idea occurred to her ; it was the result of her feeling for once quite free and her own mistress.

She had secretly cherished a certain wish ever since she had been in the City ; but hitherto she had not found herself at liberty to carry it out.

She wanted to see the City churches ; a great many of them—all of them, in fact. Not only the attractive ones, most of which she had already seen, but the scarcely known rank and file.

On other Sundays she had either gone to St. Paul's or to the Abbey, or to hear some great preacher, or with her mother to lovely St. Olave's, or with John Harbuckle to the King's Weigh-house Chapel, where her uncle was a Church member, and where her grandfather had been a deacon for many years. Coming or going when she had happened to be alone with John Harbuckle they had sometimes

looked in for a moment at different churches they had passed ; but Alison's wish to see all the churches in the City was as yet far from being gratified ; and, indeed, there are a very great many to see.

"I'll go to-day," she said. "I'm all alone ; I shall never have a better chance ! It's not absolutely raining, although it certainly has 'a tear in its eye.' I'll put on my winter jacket, and go."

I may tell you, while Alison dresses, that, with a few exceptions, the City churches are very difficult of access. Alison had already spent much time and many shillings in hunting up sextons and keys. Once the only name and address on the church door had been the churchwarden's. When she had found the place, it turned out to be a teabroker's counting-house, and she had not liked to go in. Another key she had traced to a large boot-shop.

Entering, she found the bootmaker fitting a gentleman. She asked, innocently enough, for the key ; but the man looked at her as suspiciously as if she had been a well-known burglar, and said there was a lot of plate in the church and he could not trust her. She had begged for someone to come with her ; but he said he could not leave his shop and had

no one he could send ; so she had to give up that key altogether.

She had also tried lingering in churches after week-day service (for she was a devout girl, and did not like to look about her during prayers or sermon), but as a rule the sexton or sextoness was in a most terrible hurry to shut up and get home ; so that was not very satisfactory. When she had gone in early it had not been pleasant to steal about on tip-toe while others were assembling for worship, or perhaps already on their knees ; but on the whole, she thought, the best way would be to go out and see two or three churches as soon as they were open and take her chance for the rest. There is really no way of seeing most of the City churches that is not more or less repugnant to a religious mind ; but this seemed to be the least so.

In a very few minutes Alison had on her thick jacket and a little black bonnet that damp could hardly injure, and was feeling eager to leave the house and plunge into her own element. The house was oppressive to her ; she was needing change.

She had given Jessie a great deal of unobstructive sympathy ; it had told upon her.

She stole silently downstairs. A death-like stillness filled the house. The empty hall

with its closed door looked quite different on Sundays from the busy entrance she saw on week-days.

She opened one leaf of the heavy double door and went out.

Not a creature was to be seen anywhere.

The trees had suffered much from the gale; pieces of boughs strewed the walks of the square garden.

A perfect buzz of bells greeted Alison's ears; she stood for a minute on the door-step listening to them. Some were quite near, some but a little further off, others more and more distant; there were bells overhead, bells all around, bells of all sorts and sound, from Aldgate's full-pealing gamut to the solitary tinkle of some water-side mission-hall among the docks: bells everywhere and innumerable, suggesting to her that she was standing in the centre of a vast circle of sound, the circumference of which stretched away miles and miles all over the country; bells from London's City to Land's End and John O'Groats.

Alison stopped to listen. It was not often she came out alone, and one can hardly enjoy listening when in company. She thought of some lines she had copied a few days since from old Capgrave the Chronicler, and which

she had been singing about the house to the Eighth Gregorian tone :

“Blessed Ynglond, full of melodie,  
Thou may’st be yclepp’d of Angel nature ;  
Thou servest God with such busie cure !”

Presently, she went on to the corner of Barking Alley and looked towards the Tower. The great space of the hill was empty, wide and very desolate.

She turned into the church-yard under the shadow of the gigantic warehouses. The shops were closed ; not a living being but herself and a wandering cat was to be seen ; the old church, with its three low aisles and its quaint open belfry, looked as rural as if deep buried in some country village, while from that belfry there came a soft pathetic chime, that seemed to mourn over and over again, with many a minor cadence :

“My City’s dead,  
Dead my City;  
My folk all fled :  
‘Pity !—Pity !’”\*

Ah me ! I should dearly love to follow Alison in her wanderings among the churches ; but it would take too long—besides it might

\* The bells chime something like this ; try the four lines to these notes :

Lah, te, doh, soh,

A, B, C,  $\widehat{G}$ ;

Lah, doh, te, soh :

*Repeat.*

A, C, B,  $\widehat{G}$ ,

*Repeat.*

not be interesting except to a few. So I must tear myself away. I see her going into Barking Church to look at the grand sword-rests on the Aldermanic pew. I see her crossing Tower Street to St. Dunstan's; I see her stopping there, and reading a tender little inscription on a tablet enshrining the pious, childish, last words of a little girl of six. I see her—but no, no; I must not go with her, and yet how much I wish I could!

Alison had been into more than a dozen churches before she found herself, about two hours later, in the neighbourhood of the Herald's College, Queen Victoria Street, with her face again towards Tower Hill and her mind filled with grand organ-tones, white surplices, more or less well-chanted psalms, decorous pulpit utterances, poor stained glass, fine old dark woodwork, fighting lions, gilt unicorns' horns, and very small congregations—congregations so small that, in one instance, from the door, which she cautiously pushed ajar, she could see no one but the clergyman and the pew-opener.

It was a curious experience; painful upon reflection; but, at the time, she thoroughly enjoyed it. Not that she, after all, saw the churches well; for though it was easy enough to do so before service, as soon as it had

begun, the gloomy lobbies were so zealously guarded that a hasty glimpse was often all she could obtain.

The last church she entered suddenly took her back to Scotland and the Reverend Andrew Baird.

It was as plain and, I must add, as ugly as his at Kirkhope. A clergyman, in a black Geneva gown and bands like Mr. Baird's, was addressing five persons from a high pulpit a long way off. The sermon seemed a good one, the preacher so like Mr. Baird, that she almost expected to hear him pray, "Bless and prosper the church of our fathers, the Church of Scotland." Alison stayed a few minutes to listen, and then quietly slipped away. This was of course shocking, but what else could she do under the circumstances? "Dear old Birrendale! Well, I've only just time to get home now," she said, as she came out and caught sight of the clock projecting from the church wall. In a few minutes she was in Queen Victoria Street, where for the first time since she had left home she felt uncomfortably alone and unprotected.

The broad new thoroughfare, on other days so handsome and so eminently respectable, looked really quite disreputable now. It was not deserted as the lanes had been; gangs of

men, walking very fast, as if to catch trains or boats, hurried by her, they all looked very rough and uncouth. The well-to-do artizan was no more to be seen than the banker or merchant.

There were more objectionable gangs, too, that, far from being in a hurry, seemed to have nothing to amuse themselves with but lurching up against each other, or indulging in coarse play with the two or three girls of their own class who were loitering about.

They all stared at Alison. She felt very uncomfortable, walked as fast as she could, and was thinking that perhaps she had better take a cab, when, just before she turned from Queen Victoria Street into Cannon Street, a familiar form came in sight, a form as different from the roughs about as Sunday in the City is from a Birrendale Sabbath.

Mac? No, not Mac, but Mac's cousin.

"It can't possibly be Alec Carruthers!" she said; "and yet it must be either Alec or his double."

The figure was a few yards in front of Alison, and getting over the ground with that long even swing peculiar to those whose next-door neighbour lives five miles off; the steady stride of a man used to getting along country roads.

"It is Alec! What had I better do? Perhaps he can tell me about Mac! Anything would be better than this horrible suspense! I must run or he'll be gone."

He was going along Cannon Street, gaining ground rapidly; there was no time for deliberation; so, heedless of everything except the chance of taking news to Jessie, she ran and soon came up to him.

"Mr. Carruthers!" she exclaimed, stopping just behind him, flushed and half out of breath.

He turned at once.

"Miss Bayliss! I—I—was hoping to—I thought perhaps I might meet some of you," he answered, in a curiously vague and uneasy way.

Alec Carruthers was looking in very much better health than when Alison had seen him last; but his flush, as he spoke, was still too delicate. It was a troubled flush, and his eyes were troubled too.

"I am very glad I happened to see you," said Alison; but she felt as if there was an uncomfortable awkwardness between them.

"Yes; so am I," returned Alec, but with more decided uneasiness.

It was evident that both knew something was wrong; but that neither was at all

certain what next to do or say on the subject that was occupying the mind of each. They walked a few steps in silence.

“Isn’t it sad about poor Mac!” began Alec, presently, in a very grievous voice.

“Sad? What has happened?” asked Alison, hurriedly.

“Don’t you know?”—and he paused an instant—“he’s been nearly killed! Indeed, we don’t know yet whether he will recover,” said Alec, with pathetic directness.

“Nearly killed! We didn’t know!” said Alison, under her voice, greatly shocked.

“You didn’t know! That’s what I wanted to find out,” said Alec, as if addressing himself.

“But tell me—how did it happen? What is it that has happened?” demanded Alison. “Poor fellow! I was certain something dreadful must have happened!”

“I don’t just know,” said Alec, more vaguely than ever; “I don’t know quite the beginning of it; but, as he was going down the Strand on Wednesday morning with Donaldson of Langdyke, an omnibus horse, in struggling to start, cast a shoe, and it struck the poor fellow just here,” touching the side of his own forehead. “Saved the temple only by the fraction of an inch!”

“Is he horribly hurt?” asked Alison, with a shudder, looking up at Alec.

Alec turned slightly away, seeming much troubled.

“They thought at first it would be fatal. Donaldson telegraphed to us at once. We all came South by the next train. We have him in some rooms in Craven Street, Strand.”

“How frightful! Is he conscious?” asked Alison. “Poor fellow! We have been wondering all the week what could have happened; we’ve had a dreadful week!”

“Have you really?” said Alec; but there was so much genuine sympathy in Alison’s tone and face that it made him hate the suspicion in his own as soon as the words had passed his lips.

“Really?—of course—really! Why do you ask?” said Alison, with indignation.

“Hasn’t she found another admirer?—your cousin, I mean,” asked Alec, as if groping about in the dark.

“Everyone admires her, of course! I don’t know what you mean; I don’t understand your allusion,” said Alison, sharply.

“There isn’t a rival?” asked Alec.

“No!” replied Alison, putting as much point-blank emphasis into the syllable as it could possibly be made to bear.

“Then there’s just a miserable mistake somewhere. I told poor Mac I was certain there must be!” said Alec, looking still very distressed and anxious, for he was exceedingly attached to his cousin and very unhappy about him.

“Mistake! Of course there must be, if he can think such nonsense as that!” exclaimed Alison. “I’ve been telling Jessie all the week I was certain there was a mistake somewhere; but she won’t believe me. She thinks he has left her—forgotten her—forsaken her.”

“Left her! Why he’s mad about her! It was not until this morning he was able to tell me. I knew something was on his mind. I was worrying myself to find it out, I couldn’t think what had come to him. He told me this morning; he raved about her to me; he said he didn’t care to get better, that he wished he’d been killed outright. He seems just broken up about her, poor fellow. I didn’t know what to do—I was sure he was wrong, but I didn’t know what to do, so I just wandered on down here. I thought I should like to speak to you about Mac—but I didn’t know whether I ought to do so, so I just wandered on-and-on and came down here.”

“But—but—but—” stammered Alison, “I

don't understand it at all. He must be delirious."

"I don't think so ; he was clear enough on other subjects. He declared to me he saw her with his own eyes with another man, who seemed very devoted to her, and whom, he says, he is sure she was encouraging. He saw them together at the theatre."

"At the theatre ! Oh ! that explains it all," said Alison. "We have only been once to the theatre since we have been in London, and that was last Tuesday. We went with a relative of ours whom we had not seen for some years ; he was the rival, I suppose."

"I suppose so, I suggested as much to him. I said, 'It might be a relative,' but he said she hadn't any man relative left."

"He was mistaken," said Alison, curtly.

"I'm very glad to hear you say so," said Alec.

"Why," said Alison, her voice trembling with indignation, "Jessie fainted dead away in my arms yesterday ! She'd been waiting for Mac ever since eleven on Wednesday, the time he promised in his last note to come ; she was worn out, poor darling, with suspense, and she just fainted dead away. I felt I could have killed Mac, when I saw the poor child so broken down ! We ought to have been

told—you ought to have sent to us; you can tell that to Mac if you like, perhaps it will do him good. Why should he think such nonsense? He ought to believe in Jessie, of course he ought! I don't understand people being so fond of each other (as I suppose they are) and not trusting each other at all!"

"I suppose they can't help it," said Alec, simply.

"There's perhaps something in that," said Alison, dryly.

"I really think there must be," returned Alec, as if pondering the subject. "One's people are a very great anxiety, aren't they?" he added. "I made them all anxious last year, and now I've got well there's poor Mac."

Alison thought there was something very sweet and gentle about her companion as he put the question. She sighed a little in response.

"Would you like to see Jessie and tell her?" she asked a moment or two afterwards.

"I would far rather leave it in your hands," he answered, as if frightened at the bare idea. "I will send you a bulletin by the evening post, you will get it first thing in the morning."

"You think he will recover?"

"I hope so. They seem to think he will."

My dose of medicine will, I imagine, do him a great deal of good." He paused. "We shall be able to arrange this little affair, shan't we? We will make it come right."

"I don't see that it needs arranging," said Alison. "A little common-sense is all that's needed, but that's a gift people never have, under certain circumstances. I'm very glad I met you, because Jessie frightened me so much yesterday when she fainted away. It was quite by chance I happened to come this way. I thought I would like to look at a good many of the City churches; that is why I'm so far from home."

"This is the City?" asked Alec, interrupting her, and gazing around him.

"Yes; but it looks quite different on weekdays. It's shabby and dirty now; it's very different on other days. This is Eastcheap."

"Eastcheap! How delightfully Shakespearean! Where's the 'Boar's Head?'"

"We've passed it; or rather the sign that does duty for it; and we've passed London Stone," said Alison.

"What a pity! Will you show them to me some day?" asked Alec.

"But you don't really care," said Alison, brightening. "I can't show such things to

people who don't care. I should be afraid of boring you."

" You wrong me ; just now we are both too anxious—but, as a rule, few subjects interest me more. I've never been before into the City ; I was just wandering down, you know, feeling, somehow, that I was getting nearer to you, and puzzling my brains what to do about poor Mac and your cousin, hoping something would turn up. I'm so glad we happened to meet."

But anxious as they both might be, they were both interested in the piece of road between King William's Statue and the Tower.

Alison very greatly preferred Alec Carruthers to poor Mac. He was, it must be admitted, as intelligent a listener as she was a talker ; and how great is the gift of listening!

" You think poor Mac will get better ? " Alison asked, when at last they stopped before the house in Trinity Square. " Won't you come in and talk to them about it all ? I really think you ought to do so."

" Do you object to my leaving it in your hands ? " asked Alec, nervously. " Do you know, I couldn't face Jessie unless—unless I were obliged. Pray take it out of my hands. You don't object ? "

Alison thought of Arnold Birkett and said :

"No—oh no! I'll break the news to poor Jessie. You will be sure to write, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll make it right with poor Mac. He was going to rush down here in a state of frantic jealousy when the accident happened! It was about half-past ten on Wednesday morning that it happened. Donaldson insisted on Mac's going a little way down the Strand to look at some particular sort of bag he wanted. Mac was to go with him and to hurry down here the moment after the thing was chosen, when the accident happened. Donaldson was in an awful way about it, so he had need to be, for I believe Mac is about his last chance. It's astonishing what a hold the poor fellow has gained over him in so short a time."

"But tell me, we needn't feel anxious about Mac, need we?" asked Alison, kindly.

"I suppose we need not feel anxious," returned Alec, gravely. "Unfortunately—I speak for myself—we can't help it, you know. Good-bye—I'll be sure to write. I'm so glad I met you; it has taken quite a weight off my mind."

"And off mine," returned Alison. "Only I can't help asking myself: 'How will she take it?'"

## CHAPTER II.

### HOW SHE TOOK IT.

MEANWHILE the Sunday morning passed slowly and heavily to my poor Jessie.

There she sat, still as a stone, with her hand resting on the quilt which covered her prostrate father, her gaze towards the window and the leaden sky beyond ; her heart benumbed with dull misery.

After the first few minutes, she was not even alarmed about her father. She looked once or twice at Mrs. Bayliss placidly reading by the fire, with her feet on the fender, and Topsy, the black cat, purring beside them, and knew she need not be frightened.

Presently, when the room grew warmer, her father moved, took her little hand between both his own broad palms, kissed it, and holding it to him, as he had often held Jessie's own self when she was a little child, fell asleep.

It was her left hand ; her right arm she placed on the head of the sofa and rested her brow upon it.

She felt strangely weary. Her father's mute caress of her hand aroused her a little from the numbness that had been enfolding over her and made her long to weep her very life away ; but she wept not, only sat quite still, with her head bowed on to her arm that rested on the sofa.

"Last Sunday, what ages since last Sunday!" she thought. "How young I was last Sunday, and now I feel so old, so old! Last Sunday it was hot and bright. The sun shone. Uncle John took us to St. Paul's. How happy we were ! Last Sunday I was sure Mac loved me ! I thought of him in St. Paul's and thanked God ! It was like being in heaven."

Her breathing came and went hurriedly, but no tears fell. Then a burning flush overspread her cheeks :

"I let him win me too easily ! He saw from the first how much I cared for him ! Lightly won ; lightly lost ! I dare say he even despises me for it now ! I despise myself !"

And a thousand trifling words and acts rushing back to her mind filled her with shame ; she would have given her life, she felt, to have recalled them, poor girl ! And yet how simple, how innocent, how sweet those very words and deeds had really been !

It took her a long while to get away from

this sense of wrong-doing on her own part, but at last it was combated by the sense of injury and wrong-doing on Mac's part, which again was fought by a desire to defend Mac even from her own suspicions.

Her father had said Mac would be "a cad" to leave her so ; and, in spite of all, Jessie felt that her father had used a word that never could, under any circumstances, be truly applied to Mac; even Alison, who had never cared for Mac, had declared he was the soul of honour. What then could have become of Mac?

So Jessie sat with her hand in her father's caress, and her head bowed on the sofa, ringing these miserable changes until about half-an-hour before Alison's return. By that time Arthur Bayliss had had a refreshing sleep, and had got thoroughly warm. He awoke in comparatively good spirits, and was able to leave the sofa for an arm-chair by the fire. It was one of those old arm-chairs that used to be so sacred in their owner's eyes. They were sacred, however, no longer, for their well-worn leather had given place to new, and their individuality was, for John Harbuckle, destroyed—gone for ever.

In one of these old arm-chairs Arthur Bayliss sat and smoked an excellent cigar. His cigars

were always most excellent ; his beloved briar-root he reserved for his own room, rarely smoking it in company. Mrs. Bayliss liked his cigars ; her Captain had been a great smoker ; John Harbuckle, on the contrary, had a rooted aversion to tobacco in any form ; and I am sorry to have to confess that his sister despised him for it ; she had a contempt for men who did not smoke ; they were not like James Bayliss.

“John, pray don’t let Arthur know you hate tobacco ! Poor, dear fellow, he seems to have forgotten it !” Mary Bayliss had already said, in warning tones.

But on this Sunday morning, as soon as Arthur Bayliss’s cigar was fairly lighted (in which operation Jessie assisted), Mrs. James Bayliss, after she had brought one of her brother’s very oldest and best beloved little *cloisonné* trays for the cigar-ash, had the good feeling to retire and to leave Jessie and her father alone.

Jessie’s father drew her on his knee as soon as Mrs. Bayliss had gone, and put his arm round her waist.

“That suicide on Friday gave me an awful turn,” he remarked ; “I wonder how his wife and children feel this morning ? Ugh !” shivering, “it doesn’t do to think of it.”

“Has he left many children?” asked Jessie, her great hazel eyes softening with compassion.

“Five!—eldest only nine!” returned her father, between whiffs that appeared to afford him genuine satisfaction.

“Poor little things!” sighed Jessie. It seemed to her at that moment as if she herself and all other bereaved women and children formed a section of humanity quite apart; quite separate from ordinary mortals who were not suffering special affliction.

“Jessie, child, you are not half glad I’ve come back,” said Arthur Bayliss.

“I can’t feel very glad about anything just now,” said she, turning her head away sadly.

“Well, we must look for that fellow I suppose! Hasn’t he relatives we can write to?”

“Not for the world!” exclaimed Jessie; “I’d sooner die ten thousand times over!”

“But I can’t have you making yourself ill; I can’t have you worried, you know. I can’t stand it,” said Arthur Bayliss. “You can’t imagine what I feel when I see you looking so ill!”

“I—I—won’t let you see me looking ill,” said Jessie, with a painful flush. “Don’t talk about it! Oh, pray don’t talk about it!”

“Well, well, I won’t, my darling! And look here, don’t trouble yourself about my affairs;

they'll come all right. I'm not hurt by this panic ; on the contrary, I've managed to fall the right side of the hedge. How would you like to go to Madeira with me next winter ? I shall have to go somewhere warm ! I can't stand this awful climate ! ”

“ Next winter's a very long way off,” said Jessie. “ Perhaps I shall like to go—perhaps —” and she broke down. “ Perhaps I shall be in my grave by that time,” she meant.

“ Alison's late ! ” she went on, presently, rousing herself and glancing at the clock. “ Alison's a curious girl ; don't you think so ? ” she asked, by the way of changing the subject.

“ Aunt Mary's quite right ! ” said Arthur Bayliss ; “ Alison's a genuine Harbuckle ! Don't you see the likeness between her and Ceres and the Shepherdess hanging up there ? She's a genuine Harbuckle ! I shall never take much interest in her ! She's not one of my sort ! ”

“ Never mind, uncle John is very fond of her. They get on wonderfully together ! You have me to take an interest in, you know ! ” said Jessie, with a wretched attempt at vivacity. She turned her face a little aside as she spoke.

“ There now ! keep still ! —What a likeness ! ” exclaimed her father, in a tone of genuine pleasure, passing the tips of his fingers lightly over her cheek and chin, and looking at her

with great admiration. “How strongly you remind me of a daguerreotype of myself as a very young man! Ah, now it’s gone! You are my own! aren’t you, darling? I saw myself, as I was once, in you just then.”

“Yes, yes, I belong to you,” and Jessie hid her head on his shoulder and cried a little, a very little; then, making a desperate effort, she drew him on to talking about Africa, a subject upon which if he were once fairly started it was not easy to stop him. Jessie listened, she heard him going on and on about natives, and palms nuts, and fevers, and silent rivers, but all the while it sounded like :

“For ever, together; together, for ever,”  
Through Birrendale—never! Through Birrendale, through Birrendale—never! And so it kept chiming through her brain; until—

“At last!” she exclaimed, slipping off her father’s knee; “at last there’s Alison!”

“Poozie!” she said, “they’re going to lay the cloth; you’d better be off to the drawing-room. You’ll find a grand fire there, and also aunt Mary. I’m going to look after Alie.”

“I’m not pining for aunt Mary’s society,” said Arthur Bayliss, who was reluctant to leave his comfortable quarters.

“But,” said Jessie, taking hold of his arm,

as if to lift him up, and dropping her voice, and nodding mysteriously, “you’d better go to her, you know! she’ll like you to go—that is, she expects attention, and wise people find it best to give it her. Aunt Mary and poor uncle Jim were very kind to me; what would have become of me, without them? Work-house, I suppose!” and she shrugged her shoulders, and raised her eyebrows. “Oh, forgive me, forgive me! I didn’t mean to say anything cruel! Please—please, let me go!”

She went to the top of the stairs to welcome Alison, as if that cousin of hers had been absent for at least a week. She was, I suspect, already longing—all unknown to herself—for a girl to speak to.

“Weel, ye’re just a guy!” she exclaimed, dropping into the Birrendale intonation, as Alison appeared from behind the baize door.

“A guy, am I?” said Alison—(thinking, “I hope not; but there’s one comfort, he would never notice it!”)—“Neat, at any rate?” she asked, aloud.

“Oh, yes, neat; but what’s neat?” asked Jessie, with much and undisguised contempt.

“Then never mind the rest!” said Alison; and, pausing on the stairs, she looked up at her cousin as if Jessie were a picture, and then said, with a fervent admiration as undis-

guised as Jessie's contempt, "You, madam, are looking very, very pretty! prettier than anything else I've seen since I've been out." Indeed, Jessie, standing there, the fire warmth still on her face and such light as there was falling from the window on to her russet head : Jessie, standing there at the top of the dark paneled stair-case before a back-ground of John Harbuckle's blue china and broad-leaved plants, was a very fair sight to see.

"That's not saying much! Everything must look hideous to-day," returned Jessie, for one brief moment pleased with the compliment. Then she turned away abruptly:

"What's the good of it? Mac's gone!" she felt in her heart; "I might as well be ugly!"

"Come upstairs at once, Alie," she whispered. "Don't let my father see you in those dowdy old things, he won't like them."

The two girls went upstairs.

"I've been into more than a dozen churches," said Alison, when they were in their own room.

"How thankful I am I wasn't with you!" returned Jessie.

"You are mistaken, you would have been very glad," said Alison, gravely; so gravely, that her cousin's own expression changed at once.

“You’ve seen him!” exclaimed Jessie, scanning Alison’s face, every muscle of her own rigid with sudden tension.

“I have not seen him! I have seen Alec. Sit down in that easy chair! Don’t look like that, dear, there’s nothing to be frightened about.”

“Oh, make haste! Make haste!” Jessie implored.

“You have been thinking very wrong thoughts about poor Mac,” said Alison, taking a chair near Jessie’s, and laying her hands with a gentle control upon her cousin’s, as if to keep her from starting up. “I told you, Jessie, you were wrong about Mac; and so you were; and it appears that he has been thinking just as wrong thoughts about you. No, no, dear, sit still; I’ll tell you as quickly as I can. You remember the theatre on Tuesday?”

“Yes, yes, ages ago. What of it?”

“He saw you; he was in the stalls!”

“Alison! Oh!” with a cry of despair; “and he saw my father?”

“Of course he did! Sit still! Sit still!” and Alison pressed her hands firmly over Jessie’s.

“Where is he?” asked Jessie, trying to rise.

“In London. Alec says he is not very well

—nothing to be frightened about, he hopes ; but——”

“ He’s dead ! ” exclaimed Jessie, the look in her eyes almost making Alison herself break down and cry.

“ No, no ! Jessie, he’s alive. You are going to be brave, dear ? ”

“ Yes ! Oh go on ! ” cried Jessie, with piteous entreaty.

“ He has met with rather a bad accident,” said Alison. “ On Wednesday morning he was coming here ; he was obliged to go a little way with Mr. Donaldson first, a little way down the Strand, when an omnibus horse cast a shoe and struck him. Fortunately, it just spared the temple, so, it has happened, it is not so serious as it might have been.”

“ It might have killed him ! —and I’ve been thinking such horrible things ! ” Oh, what am I to do ? Why didn’t you make Alec come in ? I could have asked him questions ! Oh ! to think that Mac might have died while I was thinking those horrible thoughts about him ! And he saw us at the theatre ; and he has been wretched about me ! What could he have thought ? ”

“ I’ve made that right with Alec ! Of course, as people in love never have any common sense, he at once jumped at the conclusion

that you were encouraging some one else, and was frantically jealous. However, Alec will settle that matter. They have come from Scotland to look after him. It will be all right."

"But I must see him this minute!" said Jessie, rising as if half mesmerised.

"Come, Jessie, come, come! you are going to be brave!" said Alison, soothingly, rising too, and taking her cousin's arm.

"Yes, yes. But I must get used to it first. It's so sudden!"—she pressed her hands against her forehead—"Alec can't be back there yet; can he be? He can't be with Mac yet?"

"Hardly yet. He was going to take a cab; he will be there very soon."

"And poor Mac still thinks I could flirt with someone else! How could he think so? How little he knew me!"

"Well, you know, it must have looked very much like it!" put in Alison.

"It must! So it must! And what wicked things I've been thinking, and Mac might have been lying dead all the while! I can't forgive myself. I've been too wicked!" cried Jessie, wandering aimlessly about the room.

"Oh! he may die. Supposing he shouldn't get well, I should hate myself for ever—for

ever and ever ! I should never have any rest any more ! ”

“ Oh, but he will get well,” said Alison, “ there’s every reason to hope he’ll get well very soon.”

“ But I must see him ! When are they going to let me see him ? Why didn’t you make Alec come in ? You never do the right thing,” said Jessie, testily.

“ Alec is going to write this evening. You can’t very well call before you hear from them. Mother, no doubt, will go with you to-morrow.”

“ To-morrow ! it’s easy enough for you to say to-morrow ; to-morrow’s an age away — how am I to live till to-morrow ? ”

“ I thought,” said Alison, “ you would have been thankful for anything rather than suspense.”

“ Don’t you call this suspense ? I wish you’d go away, you cold-hearted creature ! I don’t believe you’re a human being at all.”

“ Very likely not ; very likely not,” said Alison, dryly, putting away her hat as she spoke.

“ What do you mean by letting Alec go without my seeing him ? I could beat you ! I could beat you ! ” repeated Jessie, knitting her brows and clenching her teeth and hands.

Then she dealt Alison several blows.

“ I asked him in. I asked him several times ; but he was afraid of facing you ! Come, be reasonable (do you know you really hurt me just now?), be reasonable, Jessie. How could I help it ? Come, leave off beating me ! ” and Alison seized Jessie’s wrists firmly.

“ Reasonable ! ” cried Jessie, struggling in her cousin’s grasp, “ do you think I’ve no more heart than you have ? —you stone ! you icicle ! Tell me every word he said ! Begin at the beginning ; don’t leave out anything. You ought to have insisted upon Alec’s coming in ! ” and Jessie, getting free, threw herself down on the bed, and listened, with all her faculties wide awake enough now, while Alison conscientiously began at the beginning and went straight through.

“ If uncle John were only at home ? ” sighed Jessie, when Alison left off. “ There are all of you in the house, and I just feel as if there were nobody here—nobody that’s of any use to me now ; you’re all so unfeeling—so stupid ! Uncle John would have gone off at once, and seen for himself how Mac really was ! Oh he’ll die ! He’ll die ! ”

“ Not he,” said Alison. “ If the accident wasn’t fatal at once, it isn’t likely to be fatal at all.”

Jessie turned away and was silent for a few minutes.

“Alie, I didn’t mean to be so hard on you, you meant to do the best, of course,” she said, presently, with a quaint little mixture of penitence and patronage.

“Oh, never mind me; that’s of no consequence; I’m nobody; I have no feelings—nothing hurts me; indeed, I rather like to be insulted and beaten by you. Well, I’m going down to the others now. I must tell them, I suppose!”

“Yes, they’ll have to know. Don’t let any of them come up and worry. I’m getting all right, only it was so sudden. I do wish uncle John were at home! Alec was sure Mac was going to get well—quite sure? You don’t look very certain. How I wish uncle John were at home! He has sense and feeling—nobody else has, you’re all brutes, all of you!”

If only the “bird of the air that carries the voice” would have taken that wish to poor John Harbuckle then, pacing by the sad grey sea in a depressed and melancholy mood, how they would have cheered him! But I fear that bird of the air is a capricious fowl, much given to telling treasonable matters—such as the private cursing of a king or a rich man by the democratic grumbler—and thinking a

wish like Jessie's beneath his notice. The gulls cried with a noise like the creaking of fir trees in a storm ; but "that which hath wings," the mysterious bird in the air, brought no crumb of comfort to John Harbuckle on that cold, dull Sunday, as he looked seaward, wondering with tender pity whether Jessie had yet heard of Mac, and feeling, not without a keen pang of jealousy, that Arthur Bayliss was in all probability at that very moment occupying one of his arm-chairs, beside his own sacred hearth.

"I can't rise to it," he said, dolefully. "I ought to be glad he's come back ; but it's no use, I can't rise to it !" and he felt himself but a low and grovelling creature, as he slowly shook his grey head.

He had been singing, half-an-hour before this, with such voice as he had :

"Give me the wings of faith to rise,"

but he was only too conscious that he was still on an earth which just then presented to him a remarkable dull and leaden appearance.

Poor John Harbuckle ! Could he but have known that Jessie had wished for him ! But he did not know ; he only felt that another man had taken possession of his home and of all the feminine hearts that beat therein. For once in his life, John Harbuckle felt very

nearly homeless ; for what is home to any man of fifty unless he can himself reign supremely there ?

Only a few moments could Jessie, lying on her bed in the old house in Trinity Square, give to anyone except Mac and herself. No sooner had Alison left her than all her heart cried out, while the most lovely rosy light beamed over her face :

“ Oh, Mac ! Then you do care for me after all ? You haven’t gone away. No, you care for me ” (even to herself she was chary of the word, “ love ”); “ you care for me, dear, you care for me ! And I am very fond of you, I am indeed ! If I could only see you !—if I could see you ! Oh, Mac, you ought to have known I meant always to be good to you ! Why did you believe your eyes ? Why didn’t you believe me ? Oh, Mac ! my dear ! my dear ! So you love me, Mac, after all ! ”

And Jessie, anxious as she was, felt that Mac would be obliged to get well for her sake ; but she longed to see him with an unutterable longing that seemed as if it must break through all forms and all proprieties and go to him.

## CHAPTER III.

### HOW HE TOOK IT.

HOW Jessie Bayliss would have scorned the idea that on this earth there lived another human being to whom Mac Carruthers's life was of more vital importance than it was to her!

If we could possibly look at Jessie for a moment as a girl in whom we took no special interest (which is, of course, absurd), we might say, as we should of another girl under such circumstances :

“ Well, if Mac should die, Jessie is young and pretty, and the thing that hath been is that which shall be ; she may find another Mac, whose Christian name may be something else. It will be hard for her at first—but one consoles oneself for the departure of Ulysses, you know, even if he depart for the Better Land. We are not all so constant as Mary and John Harbuckle—(Mrs. James Bayliss was a Harbuckle ; you remember)—and Jessie is, as we have said, young, pretty and *not* a

Harbuckle ; for such as she there are always many lovers. Poor darling, we are sorry for her, but time is a great consoler, especially to youth."

This view, common sense almost to the point of being brutal, has, however, something that recommends it to the practical person ; young lives *do* recover from very terrible blows ; therefore I venture to hint, although Jessie (whom I would not hurt for the world) would never forgive me if she heard it, but I can depend upon its being kept from her, although Jessie, I repeat, would never forgive me the heresy—that at the very minute Jessie was longing to see Mac, with such feverish anxiety, there lived a man and a woman, a man and a woman to whom Love had come tardily, and to whom Mac's recovery—for which both were hoping with the profound gravity with which one watches beside the dying—was absolutely a matter of life and death.

The man was Donaldson of Langdyke ; the woman, the patrician to whom he was engaged.

Love at twenty and love at thirty are two very different things. The woman who loved Donaldson of Langdyke was a noble woman, in character, position, everything ; why she, who in her first youth had cared for no man,

loved him, no one could tell ; but so it was, she loved him.

They were both very wealthy ; they had no need to wait as poor creatures like Mac and Jessie must wait. As soon as they were engaged, Donaldson had hurried on the marriage arrangements ; but a week or two before the appointed time (it was on the happy day that Mac and Jessie drove through Birrendale) she had found out that the man she loved was an habitual drunkard.

“ I cannot marry a drunkard, we must part,” she said, her heart crushed with a sense of loathsome degradation.

“ Can you doom me to hopeless perdition ? ” he pleaded.

No, she could not ; she held out hope. He swore to reform.

Then he met Mac, and Mac at once acquired a certain mastery over him. Donaldson felt he had put his life into Mac’s hands ; he clung to him as his last chance ; he made a desperate effort at reformation. But Mac had been struck down by his side ; the cry he gave, when he saw Mac fall, sounded, as he recalled it to mind, at once like a yell of despair and a fiendish shout of triumph at regained freedom.

On that dull, grey Sunday morning, when the leaden sky hung over all the South of

England, during the time that Alec Carruthers was driving from Trinity Square to the Strand, Donaldson of Langdyke was sitting by Mac's bedside, nervously pulling at his own sandy moustache. He had spoken a few words when he came in, but Mac had passed a bad night and had dropped off into an uneasy doze.

Mac's forehead was so bandaged that there was but little of it to be seen ; the merry twinkle had faded out of the eyes, and those eyes were covered by lids that now and then twitched with pain. Mac's power to control even his own nerves was, for the time, gone.

So Donaldson of Langdyke sat by the bedside nervously pulling his own sandy moustache, while, poor wretch, two fierce passions fought for mastery over him.

He loved that woman who loved him with all the strength that was left to him. She was not far off, in twenty short minutes or so he could have been with her.

If Mac had been well he would simply have said, "Let us go," and they would have gone ; Mac would have taken him safely to her, but now, with Mac lying there prostrate, he knew that to go to her was utterly and hopelessly impossible. Only so short a distance, and all his better nature craved piteously for a sight

of her, but he knew it was hopeless; the two warring passions were unequally matched, love was but a stripling in the strong grasp of his craving for drink; Heaven and Hell were nothing to him then. He saw her, as he sat there nervously pulling at his moustache by Mac's bedside; he saw her praying for him with strong crying and tears; he felt his own heart weeping over himself: he glanced at Mac's pale, sleeping face, the firm eyes that had controlled him were closed, and Donaldson rose up noiselessly and stole out of the room. But he never saw the woman who loved him that day, for so strong, so irresistible had been the craving that possessed him, that it seemed could he only have gratified it by trampling over her dead body or his own dead soul he could not have held himself back from it. And yet in his heart he wept for himself and his ruin.

Mac presently opened his eyes; Donaldson had gone. Mac understood what had happened.

“It’s as well, perhaps, that I can’t get up,” said Mac, “or I might do the same! What’s the use of anything now Jessie’s false! How can I ever believe in truth and goodness again? And to dare to write so sweet a letter only the very day before! Why didn’t that horse-shoe

kill me? I don't see the remotest use in living! Not the remotest! Not the remotest!" he repeated, and went over and over again with the same doleful iteration until the scene in the theatre, of which every waking minute was full, grew confused and then faded away once more.

After a while Alec came in. His mother was resting on the sofa in the hired drawing-room, his father was out.

Mrs. Carruthers would have been a good-looking middle-aged woman had her complexion been less rough and red than it was. She wore a simple black cashmere and a becoming lace cap.

"You're late, Alec!" she said. "You'll not have been to Crown Court then?"

"No, I've just been down to the City," returned Alec, with deliberation.

"To the City! On a Sunday!"

"Aye!" said Alec, extracting as much sound out of the syllable as a German gets out of his "So!" And then he paused, as if in uncertainty.

"You'll have been to Tower Hill?" asked Mrs. Carruthers.

"Aye!" ejaculated Alec, at even greater length, taking a chair as if he had a whole day to do it in.

“And you’ll have seen some of those Bayliss people?”

“Aye!” assented Alec.

“Did you call at the house?” asked Mrs. Carruthers.

“I just met Alison Bayliss by chance,” said Alec, with a slow sing-song intonation.

“You met her—and whay-ere?” asked his mother with half-a-dozen h’s in the long-drawn “where.”

“Just beyond St. Paul’s,” answered Alec, slowly and dutifully.

“And you had been to service at St. Paul’s?” continued the cross-questioner.

“No,” said Alec, “I was just wandering along, thinking of poor Mac. I was just wandering.”

“And what had Miss Bayliss to say for herself?”

“She had been looking at churches and was going home, so I just went along with her,” chanted Alec, innocently enough. “Is Mac awake, mother?”

“No, he’ll be sleeping now.”

“I have something to tell him,” said Alec, with the same slow gravity with which he had spoken all along.

“You had better not agitate him yet awhile, he’ll be needing rest, poor fellow!”

"I have some good news. It may quiet him."

"You'll have seen that Jessie Bayliss then?"

"No; but I saw Alison Bayliss, and we talked a little about the other one. Alison Bayliss is a very sensible girl."

"I wish they had never come to Birrendale!" said Mrs. Carruthers. "And you heard about the rival, Alec?"

"'Twas just a mistake!" said Alec.

"I'm sorry for that. I was hoping Mac was going to be rid of that Jessie Bayliss. It is not at all the match for him." Pause—rather a long one. "So there's no rival?"

"No, and she's in an awful way about him. May I see if Mac's awake?"

"You had far better leave him alone," said Mrs. Carruthers; but Alec went off without heeding the advice, and found Mac awake.

"Are you better?" asked Alec, looking down anxiously at his cousin.

"I suppose so," said Mac, with a restless movement; "there's nothing like not wanting to get well for making one recover."

"Then," said Alec, "if you're better, Mac, I'll tell you something."

And he drew the chair that Donaldson had left close up to the bed-side.

"Yes," said Mac, looking at him with a singularly wretched expression.

“ You’re just a fool, Mac,” began Alec.

“ That’s no news, I knew that long ago,” returned the wounded hero of the brae-foot.

“ Aye, but it’s true! I’ve had fresh proof of it this very morning.”

“ You’ve met them again?” asked Mac, with despair in his face—the “ them ” being of course the couple he had seen at the theatre.

“ I’ve seen Alison Bayliss ; I’ve spoken to Alison Bayliss. I hate talking to girls, but I talked to her, and did not hate it. She talks sense, that’s more than her cousin does. We talked as we went along from St. Paul’s to the Tower, and we came to the conclusion that you and Jessie were a couple of fools, and that we—that is, Alison Bayliss and I—were very sensible persons.”

“ She—Jessie’s no fool!” exclaimed Mac, bitterly ; “ she’s thrown over a poor man for a rich man ; you don’t call that folly, do you ?”

“ Well, you see, that’s what she hasn’t done,” said Alec, with deliberate emphasis.

“ Who’s the man, then ? He looked rich and prosperous,” asked Mac, his pale face flushing crimson.

“ The man is just a relative.”

“ She hasn’t one.”

“ There you’re mistaken ; she has.”

“ Humph !” said Mac, incredulously, remem-

bering the lover-like attitude with which Arthur Bayliss had bent toward Jessie.

"Alison Bayliss was indignant at the bare suspicion of a rival; and she's the most sensible girl I ever met. I asked her point blank. I said, 'Has Mac a rival?' and she said, straight out, 'No.'"

"But I saw it with my own eyes!" said Mac; "if that man was a relative his manner was singularly unlike a relative's."

"I'd believe Alison Bayliss sooner than my own eyes," exclaimed Alec. "But then I'm a sane person, I'm not in love; you are, so you can't be expected to believe in Jessie."

"Go on!" said Mac; "what else did she say? Be quick, can't you!"

"Why, she said—and she was very angry when she said it—she said, Jessie fainted away dead in her arms, 'You can tell your cousin that, if you like,' she said; Jessie had been waiting for you ever since Wednesday, Mac! and it was on Saturday—yesterday—when this happened, that she fainted dead away."

"Fainted?" asked Mac, opening his eyes as widely as possible.

"Aye, fainted dead away," repeated Alec, and he paused and looked at Mac, who had closed his eyes and seemed for the moment

hardly conscious, as if he too were going to faint.

“I say, old fellow!” said Alec, growing frightened, bending over his cousin as he spoke.

“All right,” replied Mac, after a long drawn breath. “You be off now, will you? Be off, sharp!”

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MEETING OF THE MATRONS.

IN some ranks of life, getting married is one of the simplest things possible.

“How did you manage it?” I once asked a young woman, solely by way of extending my own knowledge of life.

“Well,” said she, “he ses to me, ‘have you e'er a young man?’ ‘Nerry a one,’ ses I. ‘No more have I ne'er a young woman,’ ses he. So we kep company. Then one day he ses to me: ‘Will you be my wife?’ ‘Yes,’ I ses. So we got married—and that's all.”

But idyllic simplicity is by no means attainable in the higher grades of society. Even such unimportant persons (from a social point of view) as Mac Carruthers and Jessie Bayliss were of necessity hampered by the opinions of many relatives.

Do not rashly suppose that because, owing to the fortunate intervention of Alec and Alison, Jessie and Mac now understood the steadfastness of each other's affection, that all was to go smoothly ever after.

Very far from it. Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers, of Muirhead, had their opinions—Mrs. James Bayliss had hers, Arthur Bayliss had his, so too had John Harbuckle : and the views of all these relatives were destined to influence the fortunes of Mac and Jessie very materially.

Alison, during Jessie's absence, told her mother and uncle of her meeting with Alec Carruthers. The incident, besides giving rise to an elaborate discussion, opened up the Birrendale connection in a manner almost too beautiful for Mrs. Bayliss to resist.

"I will take Jessie to call on Mrs. Carruthers the first thing to-morrow," observed Mrs. Bayliss, her mind full, not of Mac and Jessie, but of her own beloved Cauldknowe. "Oh, Arthur! How I wish you could have seen our Birrendale home as it was when dear James and I first went there ! It was charming ! An earthly paradise ! James had such wonderfully good taste in everything ! Why I remember very well that Mrs. Carruthers, on the occasion of her first visit, was perfectly astonished to see what we had made of our drawing-room. Ah ! You never saw James's portraits ! He had scarcely began to study Art in your time. Arthur—the rate at which he improved was marvellous ! But then he was such a genius ! Well, I'm glad on the whole, that Jessie will

keep up the Birrendale connection (I really don't think we need feel any undue anxiety about poor dear Mac); I am glad she will marry a Carruthers. I couldn't help feeling, when we came here, what a shocking thing it was that we were giving up the county families: that was one reason why I rebelled against it so much; and, indeed Arthur, I think (although I don't like to complain of John), but I do think it would have shown a much nicer spirit on his part if he had let us live on there. And you know, with our little pensions and all, it would have been but a trifling expense to him, and what a comfort to us?"

"These people—the young man's friends, they are on good terms with you then?" asked Arthur Bayliss.

"Oh, perfectly!—perfectly! Everyone of any standing in the whole of the Dale is! Of course poor James's position in the service was alone enough to ensure that! And I'm certain no set of people could have been kinder or more hospitable, nor have shown us more attention. Mac's uncle, the Laird of Muirhead, and I were always very great friends; indeed, I shall never forget the neat little speech he made when James showed him my portrait. Mrs. Carruthers was there, and (between ourselves) showed signs of jealousy.

She did indeed!" Mrs. Bayliss, seldom a talkative woman, was yet occasionally visited by a great exposition of speech. On that dreary Sunday she talked and talked until Muirhead grew the size of Abbotsford, and Cauldknowe was as eligible a family residence as any, short of baronial rank, north of Carlisle.

Mrs. Bayliss, I take it, looked forward to her visit of the next morning with an interest as keen, if far less intense and pathetic, as did her pretty niece, Jessie, when the poor child knew it had been arranged. As for Arthur Bayliss, the idea of his being mistaken for his daughter's lover distinctly pleased and amused him. The very first moment he was alone he walked straight up to the looking-glass, and surveyed himself with a satisfaction to which he had long been a stranger; feeling—alas! for only too brief a time!—that the weight of ten heavy years had suddenly fallen from him.

It was not until after some hours that this opportunity occurred, but I am inclined to think that this wish to see himself was the very first sentiment he entertained on the subject. It tickled both his fancy and his vanity that he had been taken for Jessie's lover.

The thought brought that pleasant and recognizable light to his eyes that always made him show to the best advantage. Mrs.

Bayliss was quite convinced that now dearest James was gone Arthur was the handsomest man left on this earth, and she treated him accordingly.

“I suppose I ought not to raise an objection to Jessie’s engagement,” was Arthur Bayliss’s first remark, after hearing Alison’s narrative (for his speech and thought did not go together always), “of course I ought not to object; but I should have been glad if Jessie could have remained disengaged for a year or two. I have been separated from her so long that I can hardly help being selfish enough to wish for her undivided attention for a little while. However,” and he sighed, “that I have forfeited, as I have forfeited so much besides. I must say, though, the Birrendale connection, as far as the young man is concerned, doesn’t look promising. If it could be broken off without hurting my dear girl too much. I should be just as well pleased.”

It was some such observation as this that had called forth Mrs. Bayliss’s oration on the merits of the match and on the glories of Muirhead and Cauldknowe.

In spite, however, of this interesting topic, that grey dull Sunday was a very long one. Jessie came down presently, but she added nothing to the fast diminishing stock of bright-

ness; for she scarcely said a word, and looked pale and wan.

Towards evening it became impossible for the little household in Trinity Square to disguise from themselves and from each other that it was indeed a long, long Sunday; longer than even the Scotch Sabbaths in Birrendale had ever been.

There was a feeling of being stranded, of being far above the tide of humanity that had ebbed out into the suburbs and had left the City and its few residents with little else to do but to wait for the returning tide.

On week days, during working hours, the City is a great centre of gravity; but on Sunday the magnetic attraction lies beyond the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction. Go where you will, do what you may, if you remain in the City on a Sunday you are always conscious that you are at variance with some organic law to which your happier fellow-creatures are loyally submitting. You are, you feel, where you ought not to be, where no one else is, and are consequently as restless as a needle under a magnet; you cannot get to your magnet, you cannot get comfortable, you cannot feel right; you want to yield to the attraction and run away from the City, but circumstances won't allow it.

If you are alone, you think of Robinson Crusoe ; if your people are with you, you and they are the Swiss Family Robinson ; but in both cases you are on a desert island where you can only *pretend* to be at home.

Naturally you go to bed early, how early you would on Monday hardly like to admit ; if, as was the case with the Baylisses on that particular grey Sunday, you do not rouse yourself to attend evening service.

Arthur Bayliss managed to stay at Trinity Square until half-past nine, but the last hour was very trying to every one, they were all so sleepy and all of them yawned so terribly.

It was a relief to his family when they heard the heavy door close after him.

He was very affectionate to Jessie before he left. Of course she went downstairs to let him out, and he made her promise that she would not worry herself, but would go to bed at once and sleep all night long.

She assured him that she would, and fulfilled her promise by staying awake hours at a time, and by getting up and kneeling by the bedside and praying that Mac might not die. The "merry coster" was gaily spinning down to Billingsgate before Jessie really lost consciousness of Mac and his accident. Ah ! poor

Jessie! On that morning she was in no mood for “hi-ing that gentleman,” and begging him to take her for a drive in his flying cart, as she had been the first time she had awoke in London!

Poor Jessie!

“All her merry jigs were quite forgot!”

A weight of care had fallen upon her; a fear as if that unspeakable horror—Mac’s death—had come near her. It had passed by, she hoped—but she shuddered to think how near it had come. It was wonderful to her now, how people lived on, after those to whom they had given their hearts were gone. Her aunt, her father—they had loved and lost, but they could still live, and take their parts with their fellow creatures. She knew they had suffered much, yet they lived on, and sometimes even laughed, and were merry; but Jessie, as she listened to the clocks striking hour after hour, Jessie could not imagine herself alive, after Mac had left this world. It was a thing impossible; an idea too awful even for thought.

“You’re sure Alec will have written?” she said to her cousin, as soon as she awoke. “Will he address the letter to you, do you think?”

“I should think so,” returned Alison.

“They’ll have come by now; shall I run down to the box?”

“No,” said Jessie, “I’ll go. If it’s to you, you won’t mind my reading it?”

“Certainly not; but you’re tired, let me go.”

Jessie, however, would go herself. She slipped on her dressing-gown, and stole down. It was early for the City (which is quite an hour later than the suburbs, having no trains to catch), the lower part of the house was still shut up. The letters were still in the box. She cautiously opened the little door and took them out. There were a great many. With trembling hands, and a heart sick with fear and hope, she looked through them. “Messrs. J. Harbuckle & Co.,” “John Harbuckle, Esq.,” two or three to names unknown to her, “care of Messrs. J. Harbuckle & Co.,” “Mrs. Bayliss,” “Miss Sarah Jane Smith” (the housemaid), more to John Harbuckle, Esq., more to Messrs. John Harbuckle & Co., one for Miss Alison Bayliss, but from a feminine correspondent. At last:

“Oh, it is!—it’s Mac’s—it’s Mac’s very own! Oh, dear, dear, dear Mac! How good of you to write!” cried Jessie; and fortunately there was no one about to count how many kisses Jessie showered upon it, nor to see how eagerly

she read it through and gave it more kisses, and read it again.

It was unmistakably in Mac's hand, but was hardly, to quote John Harbuckle, "a fine example" of that hand. An hour afterwards, when what Jessie called her "jokesomeness" was making a shy little advance to come back to her once more, Jessie herself pronounced it "wobbly," which I take to be an adjective expressing shakiness.

It very nearly made Jessie cry when she first saw it ; it looked ill did that note, poor thing !

It was only a few lines, literally, and not in the John Harbucklean sense, begging Mac's dearest Jessie not to be frightened ; as now the pain in his heart was gone no doubt the pain in his head would follow immediately. He had suffered physically a good deal, he said, but nothing in comparison to the tortures that ought to have been his for having caused suffering to the sweetest girl in the world. All he required to make him quite well was to be assured by her own—several affectionate terms came in here—by her own lips that she had forgiven him.

Meanwhile he was her most loving and penitent Mac.

"P.S. and N.B.—There is really no cause for

anxiety about me now. Yesterday morning it was different."

Jessie flew upstairs with the softest, rosiest light on her cheeks, and threw her arms round Alison who was doing her hair at the glass.

"I'll go out prowling with you as much as you like, Alie! If you hadn't gone out prowling all this wouldn't have happened," she exclaimed.

"Then you're sorry you beat me yesterday, are you? Come, say you're sorry!" laughed Alison, kissing the top of Jessie's head.

"I'm sorry!" cried Jessie; "no, I'm not! I'm glad, ever so glad! I never was half so glad before! and you're a good old thing, that you are! Do marry Alec, I should be so happy if you'd only marry Alec! All I want to make me perfectly happy is that you should marry that good, dear Alec. He deserves you for being such a darling as to come wandering down here! Alison, say you'll marry Mac's cousin!"

"Rubbish! rubbish! —who's to take care of uncle John? Come, come, come, this won't do! Remember we're cookless."

"Will aunt Mary really go to see Mrs. Carruthers?" asked Jessie.

"Go! of course she will. She's longing for a gossip about Birrendale."

"Somehow I rather wish she weren't going," sighed Jessie, attacking her own plaits. "You know we have neither seen Mrs. Carruthers nor heard from her since Mac and I have been engaged. That will make it rather awkward, won't it? I'm always so frightened of these elderly people, they're so awe-inspiring."

"The Muirhead people always used to be very kind to us. Don't you remember the piece of salmon that so fortunately saved us from the ever-recurring haddie on the occasion of uncle John's visit?"

"Ah! but that was Mac, you know. I whiles ha' me doobts aboot Mistress Muirhead! Perhaps I'd better not go; perhaps I'd better let aunt Mary arrange matters first."

"Perhaps you'd better do no such thing," said Alison, with decision. "And perhaps you'd better make haste, because there'll be a good deal to do in the house before you go out to-day, Miss Jessie!"

Now Jessie had been given to understand that Mrs. Bayliss would call on Mrs. Carruthers in the morning, and by the morning she understood the fore-noon, that is, before twelve o'clock; but whatever might have been her aunt's original intention, as a matter of fact it was three in the afternoon before

Mrs. Bayliss and Miss Jessie Bayliss were announced to Mrs. Carruthers.

Mrs. Carruthers was writing letters at a well-worn Davenport in the hired drawing-room in Craven Street.

She put down her pen at once, and received her visitors with a nicely-balanced smile, expressive, she hoped, of due courtesy but no welcome.

Mrs. Bayliss, as she came up the stairs, which were but shabbily carpeted, had also been trying to assume a nicely-balanced smile, by which she wished to express a certain affectionate sympathy, blended with a certain pleasure at again meeting a representative Birrendale woman. She did not succeed very well, there was a degree of tentativeness about her expression and manner when she appeared ; and as for Jessie, she looked rather dazed and over conscious that she was in the presence of Mac's aunt.

They all, however, shook hands in an unnoticeable way, and then Mrs. Carruthers, with a little movement of her hand, invited Mrs. Bayliss and Jessie to places on the sofa, while she herself resumed her seat at the Davenport, where she sat quite uprightly.

"And how is poor Mac? We were so distressed to hear of his sad accident," asked Mrs. Bayliss.

“Malcolm will be better getting. He just needs rest and freedom from excitement and he’ll be well again,” said Mrs. Carruthers, taking up her knitting, a thick-ribbed stocking, destined to accompany her husband’s shooting suit. Her hands were never idle a moment.

“It might have been a most serious affair,” said Mrs. Bayliss.

“It might have been,” echoed Mrs. Carruthers, knitting away with amazing celerity, and looking down at her work, although that was quite unnecessary, as she could have done it as well had she been blindfolded.

“Does she know that Mac and I are engaged?” thought Jessie, who was sitting on the corner of the sofa, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

“She must know; but her manner is quite different from what it used to be.”

“And how is everybody?” asked Mrs. Bayliss, with a touch of gush in her voice and manner, making a desperate attempt to begin conversation.

“In Birrendale, will you mean?” asked Mrs. Carruthers, politely.

“Yes,” returned Mrs. Bayliss, uneasily conscious of the want of reciprocity, “in dear Birrendale.”

“Everybody is much as when you left,” said

Mrs. Carruthers, turning her work as she began to use another needle.

“Our old friends, the Johnstones?” asked Mrs. Bayliss, resolving not to be beaten without showing fight. Jessie cast an anxious glance at her aunt, and perceived her colour rising; for herself she wanted very much to run away, only she wanted still more to hear about Mac.

“Poor Mac! (It’s wicked of me, to call him Mac, I suppose she’d say, if he only knew I was here!) It’s too bad! and I must see him!” she felt.

“Our old friends, the Johnstones?” asked Mrs. Bayliss.

“They returned early in June,” replied Mrs. Carruthers.

“They are away a great deal.”

“Far too much.”

Then there was a dead pause.

“Our tenants at Cauldknowe? They seemed rather nice people,” Mrs. Bayliss recommenced.

“So I have heard. I’ve not met them yet.”

“And Mr. Baird?”

“He is about as usual.”

“Maggie Baird has been ill?”

“She is still far from well, very far from well.”

“Her chest is delicate,” said Mrs. Bayliss.

“We fear it is,” said Mrs. Carruthers.

“Do they give her cod liver oil?”

“Oh yes, by the gallon.”

Then there was another long pause. To proceed with conversation seemed impossible. Jessie furtively put out her hand and touched the crape on Mrs. Bayliss’s dolman, meaning, “Pray let us go.”

Mrs. Bayliss understood the mute appeal of the little action perfectly, but she did not choose to go yet. What did Mrs. Carruthers mean by ignoring the widow of so distinguished an officer (in his widow’s opinion) as Captain James Bayliss?

The fact was Mrs. Carruthers did not at all wish to ignore Mrs. Bayliss, she only wished to ignore the engagement between Jessie and Mac, and in all probability had Mrs. Bayliss not spoken of Malcolm Curruthers as simple Mac, and in so doing assumed a sort of right to that young man, the behaviour of Mrs. Carruthers would have been less frigid.

“You think that your nephew is better, then?” presently resumed Mrs. Bayliss.

“Yes; he was able to get up this forenoon.”

“That looks well. Then we need not feel any more anxiety for him.”

“That would be quite uncalled for,” said

Mrs. Carruthers, and her tone so plainly said, “Pray, what right have you to be anxious about my nephew at all?” that Jessie had hard work to keep back the question that rose indignantly to her lips :

“Do you, or do you not, know that Mac and I are engaged?”

Mrs. Carruthers knew perfectly well what was passing in Jessie’s mind. She was conscious that she was giving her pain, and being naturally a kind-hearted woman, she was sorry for her. But she felt she had a duty to perform, not only to Mac—who was only her nephew—but towards the much more important Alec, who on Sunday, for the first time in his life, had spoken of a girl, Alison Bayliss to wit, with something like interest.

“I’ve nothing to say against either of the girls,” said Mrs. Carruthers to herself, “only it’s a sort of thing that just won’t do.”

If, therefore, Mrs. Carruthers seems to you rather heartless, you must remember that she had two young men of her own to protect from the wiles of a penniless widow, and two penniless girls; if, in so doing, she had to hurt one of those girls, she was sorry; still duty is duty, and has to be done. Her brief sentences, as they here stand, perhaps hardly do her justice. She did not speak them harshly; far

from it, she spoke in her ordinary gentle sing-song, and accompanied them with her nicely-balanced smile; nevertheless those little sentences erected an impassable barrier between her and her visitors.

Jessie's hand was again furtively touching her aunt's crape, with a mute appeal for release from the torture, for truly it was little else to her, and Mrs. Bayliss was on the point of rising, when the door was opened, and in came no less a person than Mac himself, with a red bandanna bound round his forehead.

Jessie gazed at him with wide-open eyes, as if he were a ghost.

He went straight to her, took both her hands in his, and kissed her as fervently as if no eyes but his and hers had seen him do it.

“Jessie!” he exclaimed, with every bit of his heart.

“Mac! You are better, Mac?” and she looked up in his face with such sweet anxiousness that he felt it was well worth while to have met with that all but fatal accident.

“First tell me you forgive me,” whispered Mac, inserting himself between Mrs. Bayliss and Jessie on the sofa, but with his face close to Jessie's all the time, “you forgive me?”

“Yes, dear,” whispered Jessie, too fright-

eued and pleased and altogether beside herself to think of the others.

“Then I’m right again,” said Mac. “Mrs. Bayliss, have you taken the trouble to come up to inquire after me?—that’s really very good of you.”

“Mac, have you gone mad?” asked Mrs. Carruthers, before Mrs. Bayliss could reply; “you know the doctor said you needed quiet.”

“Aye,” said Mac, quite unabashed, “but I needed a sight of my Jessie far more.”

Then, to make matters worse, Alec must come in and seem quite delighted at finding Mrs. Bayliss and Jessie there.

Mrs. Carruthers resolved to return to Muirhead without delay.

Of course Mac and Jessie had a great many things to explain to one another, but there was no chance for them that day, for there sat the two matrons, each smiling a dangerous smile, and each apparently as ignorant of the feelings of an engaged couple as if neither of them had ever been young in all her life.

But Mac was equal to them, wounded and suffering as he was, he was equal to them; in a minute or two he had recovered from the first excitement of seeing Jessie, and had plunged into an amusing recital of what, in reality, was a most disastrous affair. He and

Alec had hardly been five minutes in the room before three of the little company were laughing quite merrily.

Mrs. Carruthers smiled and smiled, and went on with her knitting.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE BOSOM OF HIS FAMILY.

TOWARDS the end of the week in which the matrons met, the dismal weather culminated in a curious orange-brown day. On that day the whole of London looked so like a painting by a very old master that it was difficult to believe it was not on canvas. In every open space, in Fenchurch Avenue, for instance, a symphony in brown was in progress, beginning near the ground in a key-note, so to put it, of the very deepest, most intense tone, and working upwards, through perfect but almost imperceptible gradations, to the tawny zenith where the mid-day sun was in vain trying to penetrate the semi-opaque clouds.

From an artistic point of view this day was not without its merits; but Arthur Bayliss stood at his door-way for an instant and shuddered at it.

“Heavens! what a climate!” he said; “if this is July what will November be? I shan’t be able to stand it. I shall have to go. Ugh!

ugh! ugh! How the cold is running down my spine!"

And he retired to his office fire, where he was speedily joined by Mr. Tildesley, who, having just made a considerable loss, was in a state of mind sufficiently depressing; but Arthur Bayliss rather liked a good growl on such a day.

The symphony could be well observed from the house on Tower Hill; but there it was accompanied by a constant boo-oo-ooing from the fog horns on the river, a never-ceasing shrieking of railway whistles, and the excruciating voice of the last invented steam Syren, or "American devil," and such damp clamminess on chairs, tables and walls that really, to most people, life there would, indeed, hardly seem worth living.

Singular to relate, however, Mrs. Bayliss, who was, it must be owned, rarely in tune with her fellow-creatures, was, on that orange-brown day, when most other people were so wretched, in an exceptionally happy temper.

One cause of that good temper was, that she had that morning received a note from her brother, John Harbuckle, in which he informed her that he might be expected home about five o'clock that afternoon.

"I told you," he wrote, "that a week at the

sea-side would kill me. I have been obliged to stay here five days ; I leave you to imagine the deplorable condition to which I am now reduced. I shall require the tenderest handling on my return. The treatment to which the ivories found at Nimroud were subjected might perhaps be useful in my case : they had to boil them in isinglass before examining them, so fragile were they. I feel almost as fragile."

"Serve him right!" said Mary. "He wouldn't take *us* to the sea-side. Really it seems like a judgment!"

But Mary Bayliss was glad in her heart that her brother was coming back : not that she was so particularly pleased with the idea of seeing him again as that she hated a house without a man in it.

Of course, she never admitted this to her masculine relatives, what woman ever did ?—because, as we all know, men are conceited enough without being told such things, and never ought to be flattered ; but to her a house appeared unfurnished without a man in it. She could, and, what is more, she did, at times neglect or snub her men cruelly, when she was out of temper with them, or thought that they required stern discipline, but there was nothing on earth she really

enjoyed so much as looking after them thoroughly well.

She had parted with her brother very coldly indeed ; still, although there had been Arthur Bayliss to fuss about, she had often felt that she missed her other man—the one who stayed. Arthur Bayliss had many attractions, but he went ; he rarely took more than one meal with them. Do you know that, as I write this, I almost tremble for the widow's constancy to the memory of the late lamented Captain James Bayliss ! That, however, is a contingency too horrible to contemplate. I won't contemplate it.

Mrs. Bayliss was just then in domestic difficulties ; she was a woman capable both of creating difficulties and fighting them when created.

The present difficulty was that Mrs. Robbins was now without a successor, or, to put it plainly, Mrs. Bayliss was without a cook. This made it necessary for the girls and Mary to turn to and carry out their own orders, and added so much to the happiness of the household, that, in spite of the symphony and the Syrens, Alison and Jessie sang at their work, or laughed and chattered, and were very merry ; the remembrance of Mrs. Carruthers and her knitting notwithstanding.

But then Jessie had had a very nice note from Mac that morning, in which Mac wrote that he hoped soon to be able to get down to Trinity Square, and have a little turn in the Tower Gardens.

By the train he had specified John Harbuckle arrived in town, to find, although it was early in the afternoon, that gas was burning in all the shops.

John Harbuckle's delight at again being in his dear City was so great, that, although he had with him a small portmanteau, he set out from the station on foot, for the purpose of enjoying the walk home, or, as one might say, with perhaps greater accuracy, of walking through his home; so familiar and so beloved was the City to him, and so very much his own.

The pleasure he took in the details of all he saw was a source of very real pleasure to him. From a fresh notice on the hoardings to the opening of a new house, which had been finished during his absence, everything was full of interest to him.

He had gone some little distance when St. Paul's struck four.

"Ah!" he said, with a slightly regretful sigh, "he'll be round soon; I should like a

quiet hour before he comes ! Better take a cab."

He did so.

"I wonder if Mary's forgiven me yet," he said, as he is driven off. "On the whole, I get on better with Mary than I could have expected; but she always was a trifle difficult—difficult and uncertain. I don't think she quite appreciates Alison, and that rather annoys me. I don't mean that she isn't fond of her, of course she is very fond of her, but she would rather, I think, that Alison wasn't quite so like her grandparents and was more of a Bayliss. Now to me there's a certain pleasure in seeing in her, just for an instant, the passing likeness of my father, or now and then of my mother; once or twice, even, I have seen a likeness to my grandfather and to my little dead sister quite distinctly; very interesting to me, this. I hope the girls are all right. All this worry has been rather too much for Jessie, I'm afraid; I hope it's over. I'm very fond of Jessie—of both the dear girls. I wonder sometimes how I lived so contentedly without them. I hope they'll all like my little offerings. I'm not quite sure about that jet brooch for Mary. Really, it's bitterly cold for July! How the trees have suffered! How glad I am to be at home! I do trust Mary will like the

pattern of her brooch!—I should like to have done right for once, but I'm never certain about Mary."

At length, in spite of a terrible block in Eastcheap, he managed to get to Trinity Square.

He alighted. His door stood open; he went into his office, where his old clerk was putting away the books, spoke to him for a few minutes, read his letters, wrote an answer to one that required immediate attention, then went upstairs and gently opened the dining-room door, not without a secret nervousness and an indefinite anxiety.

But what a sight met his bewildered eyes! There was the table laid out, by no menial hands, for the highest of high teas; every bit of china that he had given to Mary and the girls turned to account in the most surprisingly delightful manner; his blue pots and aspodistræ on the sideboard, and, better than all, the dear girls themselves—who had never heard the cab, because of the traffic outside and their own activity within—the dear girls, flying towards him with outstretched arms; and, more wonderful still, Mary, his sister, approaching with a good-humoured smile, evidently with intent to kiss! It was too much!

“ Why!—why!—why! Dear!—dear!—

dear!" stammered John Harbuckle. "Really now, really; I'm quite unprepared!—quite unprepared! This is, indeed, too much. Let me sit down! I shall faint!"

Then, there was nothing to be heard but:

"Oh, uncle John! what a time you've been gone!" "Oh, uncle John! don't you feel ashamed of yourself for not taking us?" "Look at Jessie's oat-cakes!" "Look at Alison's dropped scones! Look at your Wedgwood tray!" "Come and get warm!—aren't you frozen?" "Why!—why!—why! Dear!—dear—dear!—is that chair by the fire for me? Well! this is luxury! What a Mormon I am!" "Don't talk like that, sir!" "Oh, hasn't it been a strange day?" "And what do you think, uncle John, I went into twelve churches last Sunday morning!" "And Mrs. Robbins's department has lost its head again!" "And tea's quite ready, and"—"Really!—really! Let's see what's in my bag!" "Oh, charming! lovely!—the very thing I wanted!—a jet brooch, too!—and I broke mine this very morning! What a coincidence!" "Do you really like it, Mary?" "I've been wanting that particular pattern all life! John, you certainly *do* know a good thing when you see it!"

Can you wonder that men are the creatures we know them to be when their women folk

persist in burning incense to them in this—to use no harsher term—foolish and injudicious fashion? Verily women have much to answer for!

If it had been possible to have spoiled John Harbuckle, he must inevitably have been ruined, totally ruined, that evening!

For a whole hour he had the undivided attention of three devoted women (is there anything on earth the domestic man enjoys so much?) and was happy; so happy, that his happiness seemed almost more than he could grasp; so happy, that thanks to his Maker for letting him know such happiness welled up continually in his grateful heart and softened all his being.

He had one whole hour's start of Arthur Bayliss. He made good use of it.

When the illustrious Arthur Bayliss arrived, his heart, already heavy enough, was smitten with envy and jealousy; and he fancied, being in a state of body and mind when he could fancy an absurdity, that no one wanted him; but that even Jessie's welcome was forced and unreal.

They had finished tea and were all gathered round the fire; John Harbuckle in the great arm-chair, with one of the girls on each side of him, and Mary opposite, the old bachelor

looking as if, indeed, in the bosom of his family and almost patriarchal.

Arthur Bayliss went up to his daughter and gave her a listless wearied kiss. He felt a horrible pang of jealousy.

“Well, Bayliss, how are you?” asked John Harbuckle, stretching out his hand in welcome; he could then afford to be extra kind, he addressed Bayliss in an easier tone than he had yet used to him.

“I’m just alive, that’s all,” returned Bayliss, gloomily. “You got her off, I suppose?” he added, taking a chair beside Mrs. Bayliss.

“Got her off this morning,” returned John Harbuckle, and began a recital of his sufferings during the last week at Deal, and of the trouble he had had with the damaged ship.

But King Arthur’s arrival put an end to the sole reign of King John, two of whose subjects at once contemplated the transfer of their loyalty: Mrs. Bayliss making fresh tea for the new sovereign, and Jessie preparing to take her chair from beside John Harbuckle’s to the opposite corner, as soon as she could do so without too roughly wounding the feelings of the late autocrat.

Jessie, moved by a delicate feeling of consideration for the deposed monarch, remained where she was for a few minutes; and once,

thoughtlessly enough, laid her hand on the arm of John Harbuckle's chair, to the intense disgust of Arthur Bayliss.

The two men were just then talking about the weather, on which subject Bayliss held most definite views; when Bayliss, after declaring that the climate was killing him, became so annoyed at seeing Jessie still by John Harbuckle's side that he could not help exclaiming :

“ Why will you wear that bird's nest over your eyes, Jessie? For heaven's sake put it up; it makes me ill to look at you! She really is a sensible girl,” he went on, addressing the others, “ that makes it the greater pity she should disfigure herself as she does. She'll be blind one of these days.”

Jessie put up the straggling ends of her hair, laughing, “ There, father, will that do?” But she thought she would not be in any very great hurry to go to him, and allowed her aunt to pass him his tea; which unfilial conduct afflicted her father very deeply and made him feel that he was not wanted and had better go away.

“ I think I'll go down into the office and do a little work,” said John Harbuckle, rising; “ I make it a rule not to attend to business of an evening; but I've been getting into arrears

during my absence ; I must write some letters."

" May I come with you," said the loyal Alison ; " I'll bring a book and be quiet, I'm so fond of the office."

" Thank you, my dear," said John Harbuckle, and he and his niece at once retired.

" The ridiculous manner in which you women fuss about a man when you have him all to yourselves ! " exclaimed Arthur Bayliss, contemptuously, as the occupants of the three remaining chairs drew them nearer to the fire.

" I dare say it's foolish, Arthur," said Mary Bayliss, with a sigh that was not quite all sad, " but you see it's what I've always been used to doing. If dear James was away for a day or two we always welcomed him back with a little festival ; didn't we, Jessie ? "

" We did ; and we had a grand one for you, father," said Jessie, " it cost us our cook. Her affections were in the military, and it was her evening out."

" That's no loss ; I can't help feeling that when a man's been out all day, especially such a day as this, he requires a little attention when he comes home," said Mrs. Bayliss.

" He does, indeed !" said Arthur, with a reproachful sadness, meant to bring Jessie to

repentance. “What then must he require after an eight years’ absence?”

Fortunately, before Mrs. Bayliss could reply, Sarah Jane called her away, leaving the unanswered question with Jessie.

Jessie, conscious that her father was trying to work upon her sympathies, gave him the benefit of her profile, and gazed thoughtfully into the fire without replying.

Her father looked at her with a sorrowful kind of anger, directed, he fancied, not against her, but against fate and circumstance.

“I’ve no right to complain, I’ve forfeited all such right,” he said; “but it’s hard to leave one’s daughter when her mind is a pure little mirror, reflecting only her parents’ thoughts, and to come back and find that mind filled with other images. Is it hard, but I suppose quite natural, that when one returns one should find one’s own image—and that of the one that was dearer even than oneself—if not quite effaced, at any rate pale and blurred, and crossed and recrossed by lovers and aunts and cousins and—h’m!—adopted uncles”—this with an angry sniff and sneer.

“You don’t mean to say you’re jealous of poor uncle John?” asked Jessie, turning full upon him with a quick movement, her parted

lips curving, her hazel eyes dancing with suppressed laughter.

“Jealous! Pouff!” exclaimed Arthur Bayliss; “I’m not quite a fool, Jessie. I know I’m only one of a crowd now; once I reigned supreme in a woman’s heart, but that’s a long while ago, I don’t expect to do so again; yet I think my daughter might spare me a little more of hers. But I suppose it can’t be helped. I almost wish I’d stayed out and died by my African river, I could hardly have felt more lonely than I do here.”

“Father! is that quite kind of you to say so?” asked Jessie, with a touch of pain in her voice. “No one can be to me what you are; no one else can share with me the memory of my childhood, even Mac can’t do that. I can’t be a baby over again, you know, Poozie.” The grave tenderness that stole into her words touched him very much, he drew her on to his knee and she laid her head down on his shoulder.

“Darling child!” he said, kissing her hair; “the saddest part of the business is that we can never speak together of that past nor of her who made it what it was.”

“I dreamed of her,” said Jessie, softly, without raising her head, “I dreamed of her one night at Cauldknowe, and she looked so

peaceful and so happy, and smiled as if she loved us both so much."

"Ah! my darling, don't speak of her," said Jessie's father; "she never comes to me with a smile."

"It was the night of the 7th of April—I remembered afterwards it was on the 7th of April—a long while ago that—"

"It was on the 7th of April I returned, Jessie. Never mention that date again."

They sat quiet for a few minutes, and then Jessie asked :

"And have you made a great deal of money again to-day?"

"Not a farthing."

"Then don't you think I had better tell Mac about—about Arnold Birkett? I can't keep secrets from Mac; I'm sure we may depend upon him; and, do you know, I half suspect Mrs. Carruthers must have heard something, her manner was so changed."

"Tell him by all means; I don't want my daughter to marry under false pretences; indeed, I would infinitely rather she did not marry at all just yet."

"She will not for ever so long. Her dear old Poozie will be quite tired of her, long before she goes."

Meanwhile, John Harbuckle, followed by

the loyal Alison, had gone into voluntary exile.

It was so chilly in the office that Alison was obliged to fetch a shawl for herself, and to insist upon uncle John's putting on his great coat.

They went on steadily for nearly an hour, John Harbuckle at accounts and letters, Alison at entering extracts from a volume she was reading into her note-book; for Alison was a great collector of odds and ends of information, and was never satisfied if a day went by without some little addition to her stock.

Uncle John looked up once or twice at Alison, as she sat perched on one of the high stools, scribbling away very diligently, with the light falling on her neat little head; for neat it was, in spite of Miss Jessie's sneers and her own haunting sense of untidiness.

“Do you think that I, too, ought to be doing accounts?” she asked, noticing that he was looking at her.

“You do accounts! Certainly not.”

“That’s right; because I never could be taught to calculate. Six times three is almost beyond my powers.”

“Accounts! I should think not; you have something better to do, my dear.”

“Have I? What is that better thing?”

“Have you written that poem about the Street of the Little Sisters?”

“Jessie says the Minories are really too ugly.”

“Jessie doesn’t understand the beauty of association as you do, my dear.” John Harbuckle had finished his last letter when he made this remark; he turned round and surveyed his niece, resting his elbow on the desk, and his head against his hand.

“Seeing you sitting there, Alison,” he said, “reminds me of Woolcomb and his wife. Many years ago they were very poor; he was only a clerk in the firm of which he is now the principal, and in those days clerks used to have to work late. Woolcomb was often kept at the office until ten o’clock, and his wife would come down of an evening—for Woolcomb had the place to himself—and make him tea, and sit by him. Then when work was over they used to walk back together to the City Road, and both of them have often assured me those were the happiest days of their lives.”

“Then they don’t believe in people waiting until they’re ever so rich?” asked Alison.

“Well, that entirely depends upon the kind

of people, you know," said John Harbuckle with a smile.

"Mac and Jessie, for instance."

"Jessie would make a poor man an excellent wife, I've no doubt. So she beat you on Sunday, did she? Funny little girl!" and John Harbuckle's smile deepened.

"It was really too pretty!" exclaimed Alison. "But it was as much as I could do to keep myself from laughing outright; I had to do so, you know, because of Jessie's feelings, which I didn't want to hurt. And oh! I forgot to tell you before, but what do you think she said? Her contempt for all of us then in the house was as undisguised as it was unbounded; all she could exclaim was, 'Oh! I do wish uncle John were here! Why isn't uncle John here?'"

"You don't mean it! you really don't mean it!" cried John Harbuckle, his kind blue eyes opening to their fullest extent with astonishment and delight. "You really don't mean it!" he repeated, and with these words, John Harbuckle actually blushed; he did indeed, he was nearly fifty-four, but he blushed.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ON A SATURDAY MORNING.

FINE weather came back coyly ; the light, vaporous clouds that hung above the Tower and the mists that clothed here and there its grey walls, seemed to belong to Spring rather than Summer. In another sense, fine weather returned coyly to our Jessie.

Mac was a good deal worse for his exertions on the day the matrons met, but by the end of a fortnight all anxiety on his behalf had subsided ; he was about again and sufficiently himself to resist being taken to Birrendale by his relatives when they departed.

On a certain Saturday morning, the third after Mac's accident, Jessie received a note in which Mac promised to come down to Trinity Square at some time during that day.

Jessie was consequently in very great spirits ; she could not help being so, for she had not yet had a really good talk to Mac since the

accident, and she was enjoying the reaction after her late anxiety. There was truly a lurking uneasiness about one or two things ; the behaviour of Mrs. Carruthers and the Arnold Birkett unpleasantness, to wit ; but in spite of these things the thought of that long and uninterrupted talk she was anticipating made her run about the house with quicker steps than ever.

The domestic difficulty had been overcome, Mrs. Robbins's department was no longer headless, the innumerable curiosities in the drawing room and the plants in the blue pots were all that now required Jessie's care.

She had dusted the drawing-room, and was giving the thick-leaved plants in the great blue pots the good sponging they so much needed, when there was a ring at the bell, and the neatest of Sarah Janes who ever wore cap and apron went down the few stairs in front of the landing, where Jessie was at work, to open the baize door.

Now it was so ridiculously early that Jessie never thought of connecting that ring at the bell with any visitor at all, much less with Mac Carruthers ; who, for a wonder, had just slipped out of her thoughts.

Her fingers were wet and grimy, for the Smoke and Fog Committee had not then banished soot

from the neighbourhood of Trinity Square, and the leaves of the variegated plant she was sponging had suffered much during the last few days and were very grubby ; she was just on the point of calling out to Alison that a favourite pot of lycopodium she had been looking at a minute or two before was on its last legs, poor thing, when she heard a well-known voice asking :

“ Is Miss Jessie Bayliss at home ? ”

“ Mac at this time of the day ! ” exclaimed Jessie, and fled into the dining-room, conscious of her grubby hands.

In another moment there was Mac actually coming up the stairs.

Mac walked straight into the drawing-room, and as he entered he caught sight of a looking glass above the mantel-piece, in which looking-glass he saw a girl’s face peering cautiously round the edge of the opposite door.

Mac, without a word of warning, turned suddenly, intercepting the abigail who was about to shut him in, walked past, and all but stumbled over the tray and bowl of water Jessie had left on the floor, and went into the dining room, where whom should he find but that very same girl whom he had seen peering round the door !

"Ah! There you are, now I've caught you!" he exclaimed.

But the catching was metaphorical for a moment or two, because Jessie retreated before him until she came against the curtain of the furthest window.

There was no further running away possible, Mac followed her up, and Jessie, radiant with happiness and blushes, laughed out merrily :

"Look at my hands! They're just one mass! I've been sponging the plants."

"I saw you looking round the door!" exclaimed Mac, seizing both the grubby little hands with a mighty grasp; "now I'm going to pay you out!" which he did in the fashion most orthodox (so I suppose) among engaged people.

"You have come very early, Mac," presently said Jessie.

"Too early?"

"No, not too early," said Jessie. "How is the bad place getting on?—you have it still strapped up I see. I hope it's not hurting you."

"Oh, it's healing grandly," said Mac, lightly. "I daresay it will leave an ugly scar; but, you know, I haven't undertaken to supply the beauty, that's your business. It seems such an age since I had a word with you that I

thought I'd like a good long day. But I can go away for an hour or two if you are not ready. Only I've so much to talk about that if we don't begin in good time we shan't get through with it."

"So much?—what about?" asked Jessie.

"A good deal about ourselves and something about other people."

A little shadow crossed the brightness of Jessie's face; such a shadow as sometimes passed over the clear ripples of the Birrenwater in summer time.

"They have heard of Arnold Birkett," she thought.

But Mac threw himself back in his chair and laughed a ringing hearty laugh.

"Ha, ha! they've all gone back to Muirhead! they wouldn't let Alec stay another day in town after the poor fellow happened to say, innocently enough, that he was just wearying to see the Tower, so they packed up and went by the very next mail. See what comes of being an only son and heir! It's almost better to be a free and penniless nephew, isn't it? *I was* amused! it tickled my fancy so! Poor old Alec, he didn't half like it! He'd have liked to come down here with me to-day."

"You don't mean to say that Alec has taken a fancy to Alison? I'd jump to the top of the

Monument if I thought so!" exclaimed Jessie, laughing too.

"For heaven's sake don't go and spread such a report unless you want to banish us both from Birrendale for ever! Alec only said he thought your cousin was a very sensible girl and that he talked to her; it was rather a great deal for him to say, because he never talks to girls. But pray don't repeat it, or we're lost to Muirhead for ever."

"Don't care if we are," said Jessie.

"Don't Care came to a bad end;" said Mac, reprovingly.

"Well, I may go and wash my hands, mayn't I?"

"I'll give you three minutes by the clock; not a fraction more! But mind, not a word to Alison! as they say on the stage!" said Mac, holding up a warning fore-finger with a would-be melodramatic action.

Jessie flew upstairs, nearly knocking her cousin down on the landing:

"Ha! Ha! I know something!" the wicked child cried out, gleefully.

But Alison, who was mentally rushing after a line for her "Street of the Little Sisters," which was trying to escape her grasp, only said:

"I daresay you know a great many things; you're so clever you know!"

" You unsatisfactory being ! " cried Jessie, giving her cousin a good shake. " However, as I've only three minutes to sort myself in, I'll put off the telling ! "

" Very well," assented the unaroused Alison, calmly, counting syllables on her finger.

And in three minutes Jessie flew down again.

" How serious you're looking ? " said Jessie, as she re-entered the dining-room, where Mac was sitting, shading the great black patch on his forehead with his hand ; " that place pains you still, I'm afraid."

" A little—nothing to speak of. Was I looking serious ? " and he took his hand from the black patch.

" Yes," said Jessie, a little anxiously. " You don't look like your brae-foot self one wee bit ! "

" Well, you know," said Mac, as if with an effort, " life isn't all champagne and billiards, or even all fishing in the Birren ! "

He paused, looking up at Jessie, who had taken her favourite seat in the window-settle, with a certain thoughtfulness unusual with him.

Jessie looked down, played nervously for a moment with the fringe of her dress, and then said, haltingly :

" You have heard something about me—

not about me myself, something about my family?"

"Oh, the relative you were with at the theatre!" said Mac, quite easily; "I ought to have abased myself more deeply—but, you remember, Jessie, you said at once, you dear child, that you forgave me. You forgave me so frankly I hardly dared to ask you again, for fear you should think I didn't believe you. You do forgive me, don't you?"—and he bent towards her—"you do, don't you? Because, if you don't, I'll order in some more dust and ashes."

"Oh yes, of course I do; don't let's speak of it again," said Jessie, with a little smile that faded quickly and left a painful straightness about her sweet lips. "You know, Mac," she said, her voice sinking with each word, "you know, I am never going to keep any secrets from you, dear."

"You darling!" exclaimed Mac, with fervent tenderness, drawing his chair close up to the window and Jessie; "I *couldn't* keep one from you if my life depended on its keeping!"

"I am going to tell you something;—it is difficult to tell—but——"

"Oh, never mind!" said Mac, touched by the look of distress in her face; "Don't tell me, then, I don't want to know."

"But I must tell you ; and when I've told you you are to do just what you think right about it, and not to take me or my feelings into consideration at all, not in the very least.—I think I'd better give you up, Mac ! "

"Give me up ! What's happened now ? Well, let us hear this dreadful secret then. What is it ? Your hair is all false ? Something of that, I suppose !" Mac tried to laugh, but it was a rather dismal failure.

"You are mistaken in me ; I was mistaken in myself—you thought that I was an orphan, I thought so myself, but I'm not," said Jessie ; "my father has come back."

"It was your father, then, I saw you with ?" asked Mac.

Jessie nodded.

"You don't seem over-pleased. Is he going to object to me ?"

"No," said Jessie, "no ; of course he sees he must take things as he finds them—but perhaps you may object to him."

And then in broken sentences and with eyes dimming now and then with tears, Jessie told him all she knew of her parents, of her own early days, of her father's return ; and of Arnold Birkett.

Mac listened gravely. The latter part of the narrative was unpleasant to him ; he was

utterly unused to being mixed up with anything that was not of the most correct; he rebelled inwardly against Arnold Birkett.

“ You don’t like it,” said Jessie.

“ No, I don’t,” returned Mac, almost bluntly.

“ If I had known it before we caine here, when we were in Birrendale, I should not—I think I should not have let you fish at the brae-foot. Perhaps, if we tried very hard, we might some day forget about Birrendale, mightn’t we, Mac?” asked Jessie, very softly and sadly.

“ I never forget,” said Mac, with decision, and paused. “ But why are we wasting time?” he added, rousing himself. “ What you have told me can make not a shade of difference to my feelings for you, and I hope it will not in yours for me. Silly child!” he went on, “ do you think I’m going to give you up again when I’ve only just found you? Give you up, indeed, not for all the fathers and uncles and aunts between here and John o’Groats ! ”

“ I half meant to run away from you, Mac,” whispered Jessie, the coziest little bit of a smile creeping along her lips, until it nestled in the corners, although there was one big tear that had escaped from under her drooping eyelids slowly coming down each cheek.

Mac was obliged to leave the arm-chair and sit beside Jessie on the window settle, and say a great many kind words to comfort her.

"I am very glad you like me, Mac," presently said Jessie, humbly; "I like to be liked; and especially I like you to like me."

"Like me! Liking's a poor word for what I feel for you! I wonder if there has been one moment since that day on which we drove through Birrendale, and a good while before it, when I haven't thought of you and loved you with all my heart, and when I—fool that I was—felt I'd lost you—Oh, Jessie!"

"Oh, Mac!"

Then there were words that need not be put down here.

The good old sun, that had been trying all the morning to get a peep of the great City, came out from the fleecy clouds, and looked in at those two young people, sitting side by side, the good old sun that has seen so many a *replica* of that little picture before!

There those two sat, now and then unconsciously lifting their eyes to the gardens that covered the site of the old Aceldama, but seeing them not; there they sat, while the time went by in whispered talk, under the very eyes of the stately Roman-nosed Shepherdess, and the bespangled goddess Ceres, the Lord

Mayor, with his collar of state, and all the other portraits that hung on the walls of what used to be John Harbuckle's den.

Not the first of such scenes that those portraits had looked down upon by any manner of means! Once, another Jessie had sat in that same cushioned window-seat, listening to another young man, and had been happy with him, too, before the arrival of young Arthur Bayliss.

By that very window the goddess Ceres—but without her spangled veil and wheat-ears—had worked at her tambour-frame morning after morning, as a certain masculine person, who passed that house every day on his way to the Customs knew very well.\* So that neither Ceres nor the Shepherdess and her husband, the Lord Mayor—who had had a most romantic history—had any real cause for looking down on Mac and Jessie with any lack of sympathy.

Yes, a great many things had happened in that room! A room that has been standing for, say, a hundred and fifty years, has seen much.

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\* He used to live in Muscovy Court, close by. She parted with him because he would put the blue ribbon attached to the guitar he twanged round his neck, when he knew how she hated that blue ribbon.

There was the chair in which John Harbuckle's mother had died. There the door through which John Harbuckle had run with his little sister, Mary, like a flying cherub, on his shoulder ; the very same door round which Mac had that day caught Jessie peering. There was the old yellow mantel-piece with its last-century garlands and pilasters on which John Harbuckle had found his Jessie's fatal letter. There was the Argand burner, and the great table where we first saw the old bachelor writing his "few lines" to his fellow antiquary, and there were Mac and Jessie sitting by the window absolutely unconscious that any other beings had ever lived and loved before them !

Dear ! dear ! dear!—as John Harbuckle would say—who would have thought it was only on the 7th of last April, when all the tables and chairs, and even the dinner waggon and sideboard, were all crowded up with the dryest of archæological books and papers ! Oh, what an upheaval ! See what comes of introducing the feminine domestic element into a literary den !

"And now, darling, we thoroughly understand each other, don't we?—so we'll talk business," said Mac, after they had discussed their late experiences with considerable am-

plitude. "Why are you looking at me so seriously, Jessie? I am alarmingly ugly with this patch, I suppose?"

"I don't mind the ugliness of it a bit," said Jessie, "but I'd like to see you looking more as you used to look when we were in Birrendale."

"Ah! that's a long while ago," said Mac, half merrily, half sadly.

"A long while! why it was only last spring, and we're only just in August."

"By the calendar," said Mac, "I suppose you're right, but by my own feelings I'm years older than I was when I fished at the brae-foot."

"Mac! I don't like to hear you talk so. Have I, then, made you so unhappy?"

"You, my darling! why you seem to me, sometimes, all the youth that is left to me."

"Donaldson has been worrying you?" asked Jessie, anxiously looking at Mac, for the tone of his voice had suddenly lost all its blitheness.

"He's simply taking all the life out of me," said Mac, "and just now I've none to spare. I witnessed an awful scene last night. I hardly know now what I had better do about him."

"Poor old Mac!" said Jessie, with a sympathetic pressure on his arm.

“To see a really noble woman fairly broken down with distress knocks me over,” said Mac. “I sometimes wish I wasn’t quite so—so—I don’t quite know how to express it, but I can’t help feeling things.”

“But I should hate you, if you were not,” said Jessie, encouragingly. “It was the woman Donaldson is engaged to?”

“Yes. She will neither give him up nor marry him, so of course there are scenes now and then. Unhappily, they dragged me into one last night at her house.”

“Is she very fond of him?” asked Jessie, with a sigh.

“Yes; that’s the worst part of the business. And he really can be awfully pleasant sometimes. He’s as fond of her as he can be of anyone, that’s, perhaps, not saying much.”

“Why doesn’t she marry him, then, and look after him herself?” said Jessie.

“Would you, if you were she?” asked Mac, seriously, his glance resting on Jessie with a kind of weighty questioning.

Jessie’s own glance fell beneath Mac’s, she sat still for a moment, pondering.

She could not answer that question, she evaded it by another.

“But if she is very fond of him?——”

“Ah!” and there was a whole world of various meaning in that sigh of Mac’s.

“But if she is very fond of him?—”

“Then she shouldn’t be!” exclaimed Mac, with blunt emphasis.

“Of course she shouldn’t be, but can she help it?” asked Jessie.

“I don’t know,” said Mac. “But I think that were I only once in the state Donaldson was in the night before last, I should at least have manliness enough left in me never to insult you with my presence again. I could never see you any more; never, Jessie.”

“Do you really feel like that?” asked Jessie.

“Of course I do!” exclaimed Mac. “I’d kill myself sooner than let you marry such a man, if I were such a man myself! Do you think if I were drowning I’d drag you down with me?”

“Don’t look like that, Mac, you frighten me!—Perhaps it would be the kindest thing you could do. But I thought you and Donaldson were getting on so well,” she added, changing the subject.

“So we were. Why, he never let me see him touch anything stronger than coffee! I acquired a wonderful control over him while I was all right. I don’t know how it was, but he seemed to shrink from letting me see him

take anything then ; but now he's just broken out again worse than ever. To do him justice, he was very kind to me when the accident happened. He sent for doctors, wrote telegrams, and did everything quite for the best ; but as soon as the others came and relieved guard, there he was, all wrong again."

"He'd lost his master," put in Jessie.

"Aye ! and I'm not so certain he'll find him again," said Mac, doubtfully. "I hope I've made a rash vow."

"What do you mean ?" asked Jessie.

"She made me promise last night not to give him up ; and I did. I hope I've done right : but you can't imagine how awful it will be to a fellow like myself, who is used to constant activity, to be penned up on board a yacht with a creature whom you can't get to do one single hand's turn."

"The yacht ! I thought you were going on the Continent with him," said Jessie.

"So we were ; but now he thinks he would rather make a trip to Norway in the 'Fire-fly.' You see, he doesn't take the remotest interest in any mortal thing ; but she fancies that he likes the 'Fire-fly' a little, so I've promised her to go ; but"—and Mac shrugged his shoulders.

"You wouldn't be away very long ?" asked Jessie.

"No," he hesitated, "certainly not to begin with. I must see how we get on together first. She would have liked me to take him right away."

"Right away. How far away?"

"Well, you know, in these days no place is really far off? You get from anywhere in——"

"They want you to go to the other end of the world?" asked Jessie.

"Don't be frightened; I don't mean to go yet awhile, I can tell you. Besides, with a good steam yacht one can get back from the other end of the world in little more than half-an-hour, you know."

"You didn't promise?" asked Jessie.

"Promise! Well, I promised to go to Norway, but that's no distance. As to the rest, is it likely I should make such a promise without consulting you? Of course I am going, henceforth, to consult you about everything! Of course I am!"

"That's right!" said Jessie, "always take my advice and you'll never do wrong! You didn't ask me if you might go to Norway, though; that was wicked; but I suppose I must forgive you. When do you start?"

"As soon as we can be off. The trip will quite set me up, I expect. But the utter laziness of that man is something too dreadful.

You can't imagine any one doing absolutely nothing the whole day long, can you? It makes me feel as if I could kick him."

So Mac and Jessie sat in the window-seat discussing Donaldson and the trip until at last there were bugles, bells and clocks sounding outside the open window. The old-fashioned, pagoda-shaped affair on John Harbuckle's mantel-piece struck one, and Jessie sprang up.

"One o'clock so soon!" she exclaimed.

"One o'clock already," echoed Mac.

"And we haven't had half our talk out yet!" returned Mac. "I say, Jessie, isn't there some place out of doors where we can go on with it? It is getting very fine again, won't you take me out presently and show me something?"

"You'll be like poor Alec, wearying to see the Tower?" asked Jessie, with light mockery.

"You've something else to show me, perhaps. It's a good way from the Birren and the brae-foot, unfortunately. Oh, banks and braes! I shouldn't be sorry if we were there now."

"But there's a little river here, a nice little river called the Thames," laughed Jessie.

"Ah, to be sure, so there is! Happy thought, you shall show me the Thames. We'll go out presently and look at the ships and talk business; nothing but business, mark you!"

I'm sure I don't know how the morning's gone," said Mac, "it doesn't seem as if I've been here five minutes!"

Just then the door was opened and in came uncle John. He looked furtively about; he shook hands with Mac quite bashfully, and enquired of Jessie if she knew where Alison was.

Jessie ran off and brought Alison back with her; when John Harbuckle, after having ascertained, by judicious cross-questioning, that his sister, Mrs. Bayliss, was out shopping and would not be in to lunch, proposed to bring up his friend Woolcomb—taking, you see, a mean advantage of his sister's absence. Oh, human nature, fallible even in such an exemplary character as John Harbuckle, what must it be in ordinary mortals like ourselves?

Mac and Jessie were not sorry to be quiet a little, they had talked a good deal during the morning, and their minds were full of crowding thoughts, the consequence was, that Alison, who made a charming hostess (a much better one than Jessie, any unprejudiced person would admit), Alison and the two elder men talked antiquities with tremendous enthusiasm, for, "Bits of old rubbish are so inspiring to some people!" as Jessie remarked, *sotto voce*, to Mac.

You will be shocked to know that a heap of books and engravings accumulated on the table again. The engravings were principally of the ruins of the once famous Convent of the Poor Clares, or Minorites, in which Alison was particularly interested. Poor John Harbuckle!—it was so seldom he ventured to put a book on the dining-table now-a-days that it was a perfect luxury to be able to do so once more!

It was Saturday afternoon; business was over for the week. Already the plateau in front of the bonded warehouses was nearly clear. There was no occasion for John Harbuckle and his friend to hurry away, so they lingered.

“We are going to see the ships and the Thames,” presently said Jessie, rising from the table.

“This is a charming place to live in,” remarked Mr. Woolcomb, “full of such varied interests—incomparably the most interesting site in Europe, as my friend Harbuckle well observes.”

“It’s none so bad,” said Jessie lightly, and five minutes later she and Mac left the house together.

“Now, Jessie,” said Mac as they turned towards the river, “we really must go on talking business.”

“ My good fellow, who’s trying to prevent you? Talk business by all means; begin this very minute—or stay, we must just take one turn through Catherine Court first; I must show you where my dear little mother used to live; because, you know, you are to know all about me and mine, and there are never to be any secrets between us; and now I’ve told you everything I’m really—I suppose I oughtn’t to say so, because of making you more conceited than you are—but I really am very happy; only I don’t quite like your going away. We’ll go down to the Tower wharf,” said Jessie, as she and Mac left Catherine Court. “ We can walk up and down there and talk, and no one will stone us.”

“ What with the Tower and what with your cousin you must be growing quite learned by this time,” said Mac. “ Pray don’t get learned, there’s a good child, be a dunce like me; don’t grow learned.”

“ Not I! ” returned Jessie, gaily. “ Still, you know, if you are ever so silly you can’t help picking up something, and really this place is interesting even to such an ignorant person as I.”

“ Don’t call yourself names, I can’t allow it. It might have been all very well for you to do

so when you were *your* Jessie, but now you are *my* Jessie it's different."

"Mustn't I be humble any more?" she asked.

"You are to think the truth about yourself and respect other people's property," said Mac, looking down at her with great pride.

"Oh well, then, if I must not be humble I'll be generous; here goes my last three-penny to the old crossing-sweeper, who'll wish us good luck."

"How you do misuse terms to be sure! I call that *barter*, not generosity. Are you as superstitious as you used to be?" Mac asked, as, after Jessie had given the woman the coin, a shower of scarcely audible blessings followed them.

"Oh, all my omens turn out just the contrary, I'm losing faith in them. Such very strange things have happened to me since we've been in town, and they've turned out so well that I'm just in a whirl about everything."

"So am I," echoed Mac; "so we're both alike? I shall lavish a penny on one of those panoramic views of the Tower for poor Alec."

"This brae isn't like the Cauldknowe brae, is it?" said Jessie, as they went together down the hill, among the sellers of views who

pestered them until Mac actually bought a strip. "It looks terribly grubby and untidy to-day, and the few remaining people are horribly squalid. I don't like seeing squalid people, it makes one feel squalid oneself. Everybody is going away home. Always on Saturday afternoon here one feels one ought to be going home too."

"He let us pass because he knows I belong to Mr. John Harbuckle," continued Jessie, as the man who guarded the entrance to the Tower wharf withdrew respectfully, after having approached a few steps in order to challenge them.

"You belong to Mr. Harbuckle! I thought you admitted just now you belonged to me!" exclaimed Mac.

"Do I?" Jessie asked, very dreamily looking out on the full river, ignoring a string of visitors who were leaving the ticket place for the Tower in the custody of a Beefeater. "Perhaps I do," she went on, gently. "It is very strange! I don't understand it. Does a girl or a woman never belong to herself? Must she always be someone else's property?"

"Must we all belong to somebody else?" returned Mac. "Horrible is the fate of the wretch who has to look after himself! I belong

to you, Jessie, don't I?" he added, with a certain wistfulness in his tone she had not noticed before.

"Perhaps—I don't know," she said, in a half-whisper.

"But I do know. I know very definitely. You are always going to take care of me, and I am always going to take care of you. I knew that the first time I saw you. Take my arm, Jessie. There, a little firmer, darling. So! Let me feel sure I have found you at last. My Jessie, you can never imagine and I shall never be able to tell you what I felt when I was fool enough to think I had lost my dearest girl—it broke me down altogether."

"Poor old Mac!" said Jessie, patting the arm she had just taken. "Don't you think I can tell just a very little? I thought I'd lost you, you know. Have you quite got over it, Mac?" she added, rather anxiously.

"Yes, but you know I haven't quite got over this," he replied, touching the black dressing on his forehead.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BEGINNING OF SORROW.

JESSIE was destined never to forget that Saturday afternoon's stroll with Mac Carruthers.

There are circumstances in the lives of all of us that time never touches as long as the memory lasts. Like the characters engraven on the Assyrian marbles which remain sharp and clear to this day as if they had never suffered a burial of twenty four centuries, so are some events cut into human hearts.

The keenness of their edge is never blunted; the vivid colouring of their details never fades; until the heart and brain, on which they are imprinted, perish with them.

Such an event was John Harbuckle's loss of Jessie's mother; such an event was that stroll with Mac Carruthers to Jessie herself.

How many a time will it all rise up before her! How many, how many a time!

She is young still, who can say what her future may be or whether, in this world, she

may have much or any future at all? but should she live until the children of children's children cluster round her knee, even then she will see it all again and feel it all again.

The broad walk before the Tower walls, the broader Thames, with its numberless craft, will all come back, and so will the sound of the lapping of the river against the stone steps, and her own young figure and his, standing there as they listened to the gentle beating of the water, mingling with the sharp tones of the call-boys from the passing steamers.

The colour will come back too, the red coats of a group of idle soldiers, the grey of her own dress, the darker grey of the Tower wall, the brown of Mac's hair and clothes, the black on his forehead—and that last detail—Ah! that last—when again will she cease to see it?

They sauntered up and down, talking now of their own affairs, now of the great river and of the ships and boats, now of the Tower. They looked at the Traitors' Gate and spoke of familiar history, talking unconscious poetry; they watched a truck being pushed along, a tram from the Ordnance Stores, and talked prose.

They saw a few things that even furnished subjects for merriment; they both said words

very delightful to each other, but which would look foolish in black and white. They talked about Birrendale, and of the market day at Kirkhope, when they had been offered gloves at a penny a pair, and they observed, laughingly, both of them, that this would be a very nice world to live in if it were not so dear ; thinking just then, that it was alone the lack of money that kept them apart. Jessie took Mac's arm as they went on to the wharf and held it all the while they walked up and down ; that, too, is a circumstance she will never forget. Nor will she ever forget that, when they had seen enough of the shipping and wharf, and were coming up the hill again, and again were being pestered to buy long strips of views, they met John Harbuckle, and Mr. Woolcomb, and Alison coming out of the Tower Gardens, where they had been examining a heap of old stones over by the Postern pump, but had strolled round to the gate opposite the bonded warehouses.

“Oh, Jessie !” Mac exclaimed, as he saw the others opening the gate, “let us go and look at the curious little arbour where we sat and talked about that wretched Donaldson, on that glorious night when I rushed down here to tell you the news, and you looked so pleased to see me.”

"Oh, very well!" assented Jessie, "I'll ask uncle John for the key, only be careful, Mac," she added, gaily, "be very careful you don't mention to any of those earth-worms that you wish to see anything in particular, or we shall never be able to get rid of them. You can't think what dreadfully tenacious creatures they are; limpits are nothing to them. If they once got on to antiquities you'd never get them off, they'd stick to us all the afternoon. Be cautious now, Mac. Uncle John, the key, please. Alison, I can see you've unearthed something, but"—lowering her voice—"pray don't tell us! We don't want to know—'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be otherwise.'"

Uncle John gave them the key; Mr. Woolcomb tried to excite their interest in the old stones, but they would not let it be excited, so they passed on, and the antiquaries did them no hurt. Mac and Jessie looked after them for an instant before they unlocked the gate, and they both laughed, although what there was to laugh at no one but themselves could know; they were thankful they were rid of the others.

Jessie never again laughed quite like that; it was her last truly girlish, light-hearted laugh. She felt she was a girl when she

laughed by that gate; a few seconds later she felt she was a woman.

She and Mac walked side by side for a few steps, until they reached the broad, smooth path above the moat, the path then screened from the road by thick bushes.

As they turned into that path—it was nearly opposite the Beauchamp Tower—*Mac took Jessie's arm* and leaned on it as if from weariness or pain.

As he did, so Jessie felt her heart die down with an awful foreboding.

For a moment she could not speak.

“Mac,” she said, after they had taken a step or two, speaking with a grave, womanly decision, mixed with great tenderness, “I am sure that bruise is paining you.”

Mac had for a few moments leaned rather heavily on her arm; he noticed her altered tone, feared he had alarmed her, and relaxed the pressure.

“There is a dull ache, that's all,” he said.

“What does the doctor say?” asked Jessie. These were the words she spoke aloud; this was the question she was anxious to have answered, but the sentence she said to herself was :

“Mac will henceforth lean on me, not I on him. I must take care of him, not he of me.”

“The doctor, oh! he says it's healing up

all right enough. Jessie, I say, Jessie, don't frighten yourself about it ! it will be all right soon. It hasn't had time to get well yet, considering what a blow it was."

Why did Jessie think of that night, the night of the 7th of April, when, as she had been sitting on the little stone wall that bounded the hearth at Cauldknowe, and had asked her aunt about seeking help from John Harbuckle, Mrs. Bayliss had said, with such bitter emphasis :

"When you are a widow yourself, it will be time for you to advise a widow!"

What made her think of it then ? The words seemed to come across the moat to her, to come out of the Tower walls.

Was she to lose him after all ?

"You are tired, Mac," she said.

"Tired!—what nonsense ! I, who am so used to racing about from morning till night, tired!"

"That's all very fine," said Jessie. "I know you are not strong again, yet. It's no use pretending that you are."

"Wait till I come back from Norway," said Mac, evading Jessie's last remark ; "I shall be as strong as Samson then ; you'll see me one fine morning walking away with one of your Tower gates, portcullis and all. I shall

carry it off in triumph to Muirhead and set it up in the grounds—on the point overlooking the Birren, you know—what an attraction it will be! and the daughters of Scotia will rejoice over it, singing, ‘How are the Southerns fallen!’ and Alec, with the help of Alison, will add to the Border minstrelsy the Ballad of the Bold Carruthers. I tell you what it is, Jessie, all these exciting occurrences of the last few weeks have been too much for you; you are growing nervous. Now pray, there’s a dear child, don’t be nervous about me, I’m all right; I’m sure to fall on my feet, I always do; and I really couldn’t bear to think you were worrying yourself about me; you mustn’t, Jessie; really now, and seriously, there is not the slightest occasion. This bruise, I’ll admit freely enough, for I don’t wish to deceive you, is rather more troublesome than I like; but that’s nothing; a week or two will set me up completely.”

“Then I shall forgive Donaldson for taking you away,” said Jessie, trying to speak gaily, but quite conscious that Mac had been talking on so glibly, only to keep her from being nervous about him.

The fact was that Mac, although he rattled along at almost his old rate, was in more pain than he cared to admit, and he tried to

fight it down, but its gnawing was not to be stilled.

“This is the way to our little arbour,” said Jessie, as they paused at the foot of an ascending path nearly opposite that brick Tower at the north-east angle in which Walter Raleigh suffered so terribly from cold during his last imprisonment.

“Jessie you’ve never taken me along that other walk,” exclaimed Mac, pointing to the path over-shadowed by the dock warehouses. “Let’s go along there first, then we shall have been all round the square, if you can call a five sided figure a square.”

Jessie shook her head and laid her hand on Mac’s arm as if to detain him.

“Don’t look so solemn, come, I’ve quite a curiosity to see the end of that walk; come Jessie,” said Mac, with all his old impetuosity, and he tried to move on.

“My darling! my darling!” cried Jessie with wild entreaty in her voice, holding him back with all her might. She had never before used that expression to him, sudden terror forced the cry from her now. He turned round at once, her face was quivering.

“Jessie, what is it, my love?” he asked tenderly.

“Oh, Mac, that path ends in a grave:—a

little wilderness and a grave," she said, too agitated to prevent herself from saying what she wished unsaid as soon as the words were spoken.

Mac made no attempt to go on; his own countenance fell. He was for an instant startled by the incident, but recovering himself quickly he said, steadily:

"Darling, so end all paths," and as Jessie remembers, he raised his head, which had been bent toward her, and quietly looked along that path.

The flat grave was hidden in the little wilderness, Mac did not see it, but he caught sight, as he gazed along the walk, of masts slowly gliding by the opening between the docks and the Tower.

"But not that path—that ends differently," said Mac, pointing to the river; "that path falls into the ocean. Look, Jessie, there is a ship going down with the tide. See, the masts fill all that space, it's going right through a sunbeam. It's very beautiful, isn't it?"

Jessie looked at it and smiled, but rather faintly.

"We are going to sail together," said Mac, drawing Jessie a little nearer to him.

"We don't know," said Jessie, with vague distress. "Perhaps we are not. One of us

might be sent out to sea alone, and then what would become of the poor left-behind one?" and she shuddered.

"I tell you what it is, Jessie, I shan't let you bring me into the Tower Gardens again; you are far too nervous and superstitious for such a place," said Mac. "I'm afraid you've been making yourself ill with worry about me. Now don't worry any more, there's a dear girl. I say," turning round to the dock warehouse, and trying to divert her attention to a fresh object, as one does a child, "did you ever notice those great big B's up there? What's becomes of the S's, eh? B and S is what one is accustomed to hear and together see in these days. Those B's look awfully lonely up there. Doesn't it strike you so?"

"The Lord Mayor uses up all the S's for his collar, don't you know?" said Jessie, lightly.  
"The B stands for——

"I know what it stands for with Langdyke," said Mac.

"It stands for 'Bonded' here," said Jessie. "Everything's bonded about here, warehouses, casks, carmen, everything. I often think we must all be bonded too. Ah!" she went on, rather quaintly, still looking up at the gigantic walls, "there's a deal of solid comfort to be got out of these things; they're

like Alison in that respect. Docks and warehouses and foreign produce, and so on, don't make one eerie, like those old prison lodgings do. Prose is a very fine thing, Mac, don't you think so now? "

"Now? When did I ever think anything else, you funny little creature? Go on—I know you've more to say, I can see it in your face," said Mac, still intent on cheering her as well as he could, for she had alarmed him by her terror.

"Yes," said Jessie. "How nice it would be if you were a City man! If, for instance, you were learning indigo, or ivory, or palm oil, or tea. By-the-bye, I have learned to recognize the young men who are studying tea; they always have such new, new hats, they are always got up so nattily (you must excuse that horrid word, but it's the only one that expresses them), and they run about in a desperate hurry with a little sample canister tucked most cunningly under one arm, just as if it were part of themselves. Oh, there's no mistaking them!"

The merry, merry twinkle came once more into Mac's eyes.

"How I could fancy myself as a young man learning tea!" he laughed. "So that's the sort of fellow you admire, is it?"

"No, it's the solid advantages of all these things," said Jessie. "Only, to be sure, they go wrong sometimes, and people kill themselves for shellac and other drysaltery. A man killed himself last week, you know, for something of—"

"Jessie! Get out of the way, Jessie!" cried Mac, drawing her back suddenly.

"Ah! they're stoning us! I forgot—" and a great piece of brick-bat fell about a yard in front of her.

"The rascal! There he goes! Ugh! I wish I could catch him!" exclaimed Mac, gnashing his teeth with rage. "Ugh! If I had you, you rascal!" shouted Mac.

"It's our fault! We shouldn't have stood here talking. Make haste, let us get home. We shall be safe there. We ought not to have stood here where they can see us. I told you it enrages them too much. They hate decent people. Make haste home."

"If I could only catch him!" ejaculated Mac, fiercely. Just then the bruise on his forehead pained him so much that it was a relief to him to be able to shout after the wretched urchin who had thrown the stone.

"Shall we go into the little arbour?" said Mac, "that rascal has frightened you."

"No, no," said Jessie. "Let us get home

as soon as we can. I can't stay here any longer. No, Mac—I can't take your arm, they might stone us again. Come, let us get home." And she went up to the gate, Mac following, and so they left the Tower Gardens.

The Lurlei of the Rhine sits, as the song tells us, upon a rock and combs her golden hair with a golden comb, while she watches for her prey; the locks of the bare-headed Lurlei of the Thames, who haunts the corner opposite St. Katherine Docks, appear as if no comb, golden or otherwise, often touched them. The Lurlei and the gallant British Tar were standing about unmolested when Mac and Jessie left the gardens by the gate opposite the Mint. No one, apparently, had thought of stoning *them*.

Going along the narrow Postern Row, Mac and Jessie were sore beset by the local photographer, who wanted to take their portraits; that is to say, they would have been had not Mac made short work of him, and pushed on. Mac was in no mood for standing nonsense just then; he would have liked to have put the matter of that brick-bat at once into the hands of the City police; only it so happened that it had been thrown just outside the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction.

“ Poor old Mac ! how furious he was about that brick-bat, to be sure ! He didn’t make near as much fuss about the place on his forehead ! ” said Jessie, many a time afterwards to Alison.

Jessie did not know at the time how much of that furiousness was due to the pain of that bad place.

She was thankful when they left Postern Row with its motley passengers, where the seamen of all nations are often to be found among a choice selection of London roughs of the loafing kind, of which last class it must be confessed Jessie had an abject terror ; she was thankful, I say, when she and Mac reached the broad white pavement in front of the elegant Trinity House.

There she ventured to take Mac’s arm :

“ I have a mortal dread of the lower orders,” said she, “ you can’t think how frightened I am of them. Alison isn’t ; but then, I don’t know how it is, they never annoy her, although she often goes prowling about those dreadful streets behind the Mint. But no one ever annoys her ; now they never lose an opportunity of frightening me.”

“ Jessie, never go out alone here,” said Mac, almost sternly ; then, his tone suddenly altering, “ How I wish I could take you right away,

he said, "I shall never feel comfortable about you as long as you are here."

"Oh!" said Jessie, "they all look after me very well, and, you see, your presence was no protection just now, quite the contrary."

"It makes me long for the regions of the Far West!" said Mac, relapsing into something like his ordinary tone. "I often think I should like to go out to the plains beyond the Rocky Mountains and shoot wapiti; there the London rough would never come and there my little income would be wealth vast as the boundless prairies. I would be off at once only I can't bear the idea of your pretty hands being employed in nothing but washing up greasy pots and pans; which seems to be the only occupation of the wife of the wapiti hunter; and, of course, I couldn't settle anywhere without you. No, Jessie, I'm afraid I couldn't stand it; neither could you. Ah! If those masts down yonder only belonged to that ship of mine that won't come home! Well, they don't! I must be getting back to Langdyke, I left him this morning with that very noble woman who has the sublime folly to love him, when I came down to look——"

"At the sublimely foolish Jessie — eh, Mac?"

"Eh, Mac? — eh, Mac?" he repeated, with a

fond, playful mimicry, and then they found themselves again at John Harbuckle's door.

They looked for an instant into each other's faces, were each conscious that the other was hiding something? They smiled, turned grave at once, and went on through the hall and up the stairs. Jessie went first; hidden from Mac, her eyes dimmed with tears, her features grew tremulous.

Mac followed and, now Jessie was not looking at him, he allowed his brow to contract with sharp physical pain.

"You will have a cup of tea before you go?" asked Jessie, without turning round.

"Thanks, I shall be glad of it," he said, and Jessie's quick, anxious ear detected a suppressed agony in his voice, an uncommon ring of suffering in the commonplace phrase.

She did not turn and look at him, feeling instinctively that he would rather she did not, but she stretched a sympathizing hand backwards to him.

He bent and kissed the outstretched palm, pressing it tightly to his lips which a moment before he had been biting; and as he did so a sharp pain touched Jessie's heart:

"Oh," she felt, "am I going to lose him, after all?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SYMPATHY.

“Oh, Mac! There must be people!” whispered Jessie, as she and he passed the baize doors and caught the hum of voices in the drawing-room.

“Then let me go at once,” said Mac.

“But if it’s my father!” said Jessie, “you must see him, mustn’t you?”

“For one moment only, then!” said Mac, wearily, and Jessie, opening the drawing-room door, found, it seemed to her, quite a large gathering.

Mrs. Bayliss had returned, but still was wearing her bonnet and mantle. She had drawn a chair up to the open window; opposite her was a man, whom Jessie did not recognize, who had drawn another chair up to the window.

Alison was pouring out tea at a small table, John Harbuckle and Mr Woolcomb were sitting near her; the whole of them,

however, were listening to Arthur Bayliss, who, cup in hand, held the hearth-rug (was standing on it, I mean) and also the attention of all the company.

He was spinning them an African yarn, and he yarned extremely well.

Jessie shrank from the scene, it looked too festive for her, but she knew she must face it.

The entrance of Jessie and Mac put a temporary end to Arthur Bayliss's anecdote. He looked up at Jessie, who at once went to him.

"Father," she said, under her voice, "here is Mac."

Arthur Bayliss put his cup into his left hand and offered Mac his right.

"How are you?" he asked; "all right again, I hope." For himself he was just then quite at his best.

"Thanks, I'm getting along," said Mac; "this"—and he touched the black patch—"this is worrying me a little just now."

"An awkward place to be hit in," observed Bayliss.

"Yes," assented Mac, looking round for Jessie, who had gone to fetch him some tea, "yes, but it's healing fairly. Thank you, Jessie. No, I won't stay."

And he drank off the tea and went abruptly, after promising Jessie to see her again in a day or two.

“Jessie, don’t you remember Major Merri-man?” asked Mrs. Bayliss, indicating the man who was sitting opposite her.

“You called on us one day at Cauldknowe, a very long time ago, didn’t you?” asked Jessie, suddenly remembering him.

“Yes; I suppose I’m a good deal changed since then, and, bless me! why you’re quite grown up!” exclaimed the Major, as if greatly amazed at the astounding fact.

Jessie said she supposed she was no longer a little girl, and, as soon as possible, retreated into the shade of the curtain, as she was in no humour for conversation just then.

Arthur Bayliss recommenced his yarn; few things gave him greater pleasure than to have the undivided attention of an audience:

“And there we saw the poor wretch bobbing up and down, and drifting further and further away from the ship, and the albatrosses flapping over him.”

“Father, how can you repeat such awful things,” said Jessie, from the shade of the curtain. “What a horrible story!”

“It’s quite true, though; and I remember on another occasion,” and off he went on to

some more horrors, during the telling of which Jessie quietly slipped away.

"You were sitting behind the curtain, so you lost sight of the little Major's expression while uncle Arthur was talking," said Alison, some time afterwards to Jessie. "That was a pity, the little Major's expression was indeed well worth seeing."

There are, as a very small amount of observation will convince us, majors and majors. All majors are not tall and spare with shaven cheeks and a heavy moustache. Major Merri-man, whose age was probably forty-six or thereabout, was a round little man, who had managed to preserve an almost infantile freshness of countenance. As Arthur Bay-liss spoke, the Major looked across at him with the guileless wonderment of a boy of six, who for the first time hears a shark or alligator story. No one could think then of him as the hero of those tremendous adventures he sometimes recounted to confiding friends. He could talk about tigers as well as any man in Her Majesty's Service. He had the roundest, smoothest face imaginable, upon which many years of Indian life had left scarcely a trace, and a couple of round, childish eyes, that had looked quite shy and startled when Jessie spoke to him. He was a most singularly

unspoiled-looking creature, was this little Major Merriman, this comparatively elderly “Age of Innocence.”

Half-an-hour before Mac and Jessie had come in Mrs. Bayliss had returned.

She had been out shopping, for now, what with her own pension, and the unencumbered rent at Cauldknowe, and no Jessie to buy for, she felt herself justified in occasionally spending a little money on dress and so on for herself and Alison. She liked spending money, but shopping made her very weary.

She was in the most delightful temper when Jessie came home, but half-an-hour before she had been tired and in the very worst of humours. What had caused the difference? Simply this :

As she went up to the baize door, on her return, what should she see but a man coming away from it.

A glance sufficed to show her it was not John Harbuckle, nor poor, dear Arthur, nor that wretched old Woolcomb, nor any other of John’s cronies.

He came down a stair or two, he raised his hat, which was nearly covered by a deep mourning band, and simultaneously both exclaimed :

“ It must be Major Merriman ! ”

“Mrs. Bayliss, how are you?”

And the Major, when he spoke, took the widow’s dark-gloved hand, and pressed it between his own; for he was one of those men with softly-padded palms, who invariably press a woman’s hand whenever they have the chance.

“Major Merriman, I’m delighted to see you!” exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, her weariness vanishing like the mists of dawn before the rising sun. “How fortunate I happened to return! Was no one at home? Well, come upstairs and tell me all the news. It is years since we met.”

He followed her into the drawing-room. Mrs. Bayliss drew up a chair to the narrow, old-fashioned window, and indicated the opposite one to her visitor.

“Let me see, you and Bayliss were at Malta with us, weren’t you? I am at Woolwich now. In fact I have a staff appointment,” said the Major, taking the chair.

“You were always so lucky!” sighed Mrs. Baylis; thinking of her poor James and of his many and signal failures.

“Ah! don’t say so!” returned the Major, with even a heavier sigh than Mrs. Bayliss’s, his limpid eyes clouding over like a grieved child’s; “you have heard of my great loss?”

Mrs. Baylis did not speak, but simply inclined her head in token of her acknowledgment of the sad fact.

"You remember my poor Emma? She was with us at Malta," he said, very sorrowfully.

"I do indeed!" said Mrs. Bayliss with sympathetic emphasis.

("Indeed I do, she tried to flirt with my husband," she added to herself.)

"When did it happen?" asked the widow, under her voice.

"Just four months ago this very day. I can't get over it," he said, with simple grief.

"One cannot," she returned, with emotion, thinking not of the Major's late wife but of the grave beside the Birren.

"One cannot! No, one cannot :" he added. There was a pause, a very speaking silence, and then the Major drew out a locket that was attached to a jet guard, opened it and showed it to the widow, without uttering a word.

Mrs. Bayliss looked at it attentively and again sighed.

"It does not do her justice," she murmured, in a carefully modulated voice.

"What could ?" asked the poor widower.

Then he carefully closed the locket and gazed sadly out of the window.

He was in the deepest mourning, in a suit of the blackest black, with a waistcoat of almost clerical cut, and a black stock with a jet pin in it; and he wore his late wife's wedding ring upon his little finger.

Mrs. Bayliss, although it was not far from two years since the Captain's death, was still in the first weeds.

She thought it would be a relief to the Major to talk about his late Emma, so she drew him on to a recital of her illness and death; and then told him a great deal about her own late James.

"Poor Bayliss!—Poor Bayliss! Good kind fellow!" ejaculated the Major; "and has he really been gone so long? Nearly two years?"

"Six hundred and ninety-five days," said Mrs. Bayliss, with emphasis.

"As long as that!" exclaimed the little Major, opening his startled eyes to their widest extent.

"Six hundred and ninety-five days," repeated Mrs. Bayliss, then she too looked sadly out of the window, and rested her glance on the new barracks of the Tower.

The little Major was deeply touched.

“Poor Bayliss!” he murmured, sympathetically; “poor Bayliss!”

“And you are living near Woolwich now, I suppose?” asked Mrs. Bayliss, turning towards him again.

“Yes, I’ve a house on the Common,” he replied.

“Ah! That was where I first met poor James,” said Mrs. Bayliss.

“It is a very comfortable little house,” said the Major. “I have a sister living with me. You remember her, I daresay, she is—she was engaged to a gunner, Charlie Duke; it was broken off. He left his bones in Ashantee, poor fellow. Lettie takes care of me and my boy, but”—and he found a difficulty in getting any further.

“And how did you happen to hear of us?” asked Mrs. Bayliss, coming to the rescue.

“I’ve often wondered what had become of you all. I often said to poor Emma, ‘Now, do write to Cauldknowe and ask how they all are;’ but, poor thing, her health was so bad and everything was such a trouble to her that the letter was put off and put off, until at last it was never written. I happened to be over at the Tower upon business this morning and I heard of you from a man who had been in

the 160th, so I made up my mind to call at once. I'm glad you all seem so——”

Just then Alison and the other two earth-worms arrived, followed, after a few minutes, by Arthur Bayliss, whom the Major was extremely astonished to see :

“ Why, I thought you went to the bottom of the sea, years ago,” he exclaimed.

“ That was another Arthur Bayliss ; I've been out in Africa ; ” returned the wanderer with quiet self-possession.

“ And I in India.”

Then, as is the nature of men who have lived long abroad, they easily drifted into yarning.

Mr. Wooleomb, with whom during the recent walk John Harbuckle had had several differences of opinion, presently departed, laden with the three books he had just picked up at a stall, and sundry small bags of dainties for his invalid wife ; but the Major lingered on. It might have been the charm of Arthur Bayliss's eloquencee, or it might have been the comfort of Mary's silent sympathy ; but certain it is he lingered. Certain also is it that John Harbuckle afterwards observed to himself :

“ I think Mary is already much benefited by her stay here. The improvement is

doubtless attributable to her comparative freedom from carking care and petty annoyances. I really thought her quite good-looking as she sat by the window listening to Arthur Bayliss this afternoon. Poor Mary, what a pretty girl she used to be!"

Mary was in a perfectly lovely frame of mind for the whole of the Sunday, a day which, in the City at any rate, is apt to be rather trying to some people ; and which was, as a rule, especially so to Mrs. Bayliss, who at all times hated it there.

Mrs. Bayliss had talked to the Major freely about the late Captain, and it had done her a great deal of good ; she felt very much the better for it. She had spoken more freely to the Major on this subject than she had ever been able to do to John Harbuckle or Arthur Bayliss.

And Major Merriman had been very sympathetic.

## CHAPTER IX.

### PARTINGS.

“**A**ND when do you think you will be back from Norway, Mac?” asked Jessie, when Mac came to bid her good-bye.

“That just depends upon circumstances,” Mac answered. “If he gives me too much trouble I shall return at once; if not, we will try to make out the fine weather. I should think, though, two months would be the very longest. And now, Jessie, you are not to worry yourself about me; you understand, darling. You see, I am much better already, and this trip will be all I need to set me up thoroughly. Nothing could be more fortunate. You promise not to worry yourself?”

“Yes,” said Jessie, resolutely. “If you really are better, I won’t. Only I know it was paining you dreadfully on Saturday.”

“Yes, it was, most atrociously; but it’s better again now. I don’t think there is the slightest cause for anxiety.”

“Would you tell me if there were?” asked

Jessie, turning up her face to his with half a smile on her lips, but a penetrating gravity in her eyes.

His own softened as they met her gaze.

“Could I ever hide anything from you ? ” he asked, kissing her.

“That’s no answer to my question ! ” said she, with a more persistent steadiness than he had expected.

“Believe me, dear, there is nothing to be frightened about. Never fear that I could hide anything from you, Jessie ; I tell you I could no more keep a secret from you than I could fly.”

“Ah ! But you might be afraid of hurting me ! ” said Jessie.

“Well, you’d not have me be *not* afraid of hurting you ? Eh ? ” And Mac tried to turn the subject. “Of course I shall always be afraid of hurting you ; should I be a man if it were not so ? ”

“Shall I tell you what would hurt me most of all ? ” asked Jessie, still with that same persistent gravity.

“Yes, if you like ! ” said Mac, with assumed gaiety. “My sweetest ! Don’t look so anxious ; I’m not worth it, Jessie ! ” he added, quite huskily.

“Yes, you are,” she said, with simple direct-

ness ; for she was feeling much too grave for play then. “ Oh, Mac, dear, nothing would ever hurt me like *not being told !* ”

“ Then you *shall* be told, Jessie—don’t you believe me?—you shall be told when there is anything to tell. There now, I promise ! Won’t you believe me? or are you going to be the first person that has ever doubted my word? Don’t you know I’ve always been called ‘ honest old Mac ? ’ ”

They were standing before John Harbuckle’s ancestral Lord Mayor ; Jessie, with a hand on each of Mac’s arms.

Mac looked down upon her with such frank, truthful love, that she was obliged to say, playfully dropping into the Birrendale accent, although the fear in her heart would not be still :

“ Nae, I’ll just trust ye, Mac ! ”

The ancestral Lord Mayor has not revealed Mac’s reply ; probably it was not given in words.

Mac had but little time to give to adieux. He and Jessie had to be satisfied with a brief interview.

After it was over ; when the clock on the old mantel-piece told Mac he must stay no longer they went up to John Harbuckle’s den, and there they found him conversing earnestly with Jessie’s father, who was smoking a cigar.

Mac shook hands with both ; they both wished him a good journey, and good-bye ; then immediately after he was gone resumed their conversation, which was not at all antiquarian.

In the drawing-room they found Alison and her mother, and also Major Merriman, who looked as startled when Mac bade them all farewell, as if his going had not been the theme of Mrs. Bayliss's discourse at the very moment when she was interrupted by the entrance of Mac and Jessie.

“ The colour of Mrs. Bayliss's hair puts me in mind of the Swedish girls. Ah ! I wonder if they'll be half as charming as those idols of my youth, the Viennese. Do you remember how awfully, frantically jealous you were of those Viennese girls I met at Nice ? They were just perfection ! How I wish I were going to Nice instead of Norway ! ” said Mac, as they went downstairs together.

“ Perhaps,” said Jessie, nodding her head, as she used to do very frequently in the brae-foot days, “ perhaps I may go to a ball or two at Woolwich next season. Perhaps—by-the-bye, I forgot to tell you I saw young Johnstone—Captain he is now—going into the Tower only yesterday. He's quartered there ;

Major Merriman heard of us through him.  
Ha! ha ! Mr. Mac!"

" Ha ! ha ! Miss Jessie ! "

" Of course, if you are going away, I must flirt with someone else ! Ah, Mac ! I remember one night while you were at Nice, I said to myself, ' Now, I don't know where he is, but I'm quite sure what he's doing, why flirting, of course ! ' and, by your own confession, I was right."

" Never no more, Jessie, never no more ! " exclaimed Mac.

" Until next time ! eh, Mac ? "

This last remark was made down at the hall-door, which was then closed ; so they managed to have one little game of play before they again grew serious and parted.

Jessie stood at the door looking after him until he was lost to her and then she ran upstairs and cried her heart out.

As for Mac, the merry twinkle all died out of his eyes as he turned away from John Harbuckle's door-step in Trinity Square. Mac steadily plodding along Tower Street looked a good deal older, somehow, than the Mac Carruthers who had stood in the biting east wind on the red step at Cauldknowe which Janet had made so beautiful, in her own esteem, with red ochre and whiting. Perhaps

he was sad at leaving Jessie, perhaps it was the effect of that black patch on his forehead, or perhaps it was Langdyke ; certainly much of his blitheness was gone. What of that?—he was young enough for it all to come back again.

But if he were less blithe than on that day when Jessie had heard the trot of his horse coming down the avenue, there was a depth of happiness in his heart he had not dreamed of then. There was, indeed, a twinge of agony when he turned away from Jessie to which the physical pain of Saturday seemed as nothing ; but underneath all there was a happiness, a bliss, that made him greatly and gently humble.

“Who am I that I should be so much loved, and by so sweet a girl ? ” he said, in the innermost depths of his heart. “I’m not worthy of her ! I told her the very truth, I’m not worthy of her. Oh, I hope I may be ! ” That last aspiration was very like a prayer.

An hour later Mac was sitting in a drawing-room somewhere near Eaton Square, talking, under his voice, to an elderly couple, the parents of that “sublimely foolish woman,” who loved Donaldson of Langdyke.

It was a large double drawing-room. A

grand piano was at the further end of the room, Donaldson was seated at it, *she* was standing by him, turning over the leaves of a book of Mendelssohn's duets. Presently they began singing, "I would that my love," perhaps the most sympathetic of all.

There is something strange about that duet which one hears so often sung, and so rarely well sung.

I have heard that duet murdered by good singers with fine voices, I also remember it as the most exquisite of all sweet music as it used to be simply given, without accompaniment, by two sisters, or by a brother and sister, who had scarcely a voice between them, on summer evenings, sitting on a ledge of an open window, overlooking the Thames. It is a theory of mine (of no value, but "mine own,") that the perfect accord which that duet demands can only be obtained by members of the same family. There was a remote consanguinity between Donaldson and the woman who was singing with him, they both possessed the family voice; there was also between them that other sympathy of which Heine's words speak.

It struck Mac, but it may have been because his own feelings were so strongly excited, it struck him that he had never before heard

such perfect tunableness. She had a pure soprano, he as pure a tenor ; two strings of one clear harp. They loved music, they loved each other—in the song they were one.

The whispered conversation ceased as that one voice in its two sweet tones rose together. Mac looked across the long rooms to the piano that stood before a mass of flowers and foliage, with a grave and infinite pity.

He was not highly imaginative, the type did not immediately and distinctly suggest its antitype to his mind ; but he was vaguely conscious of two lovers singing on the brink of hell, gazing up the while into the heavens that one of them had lost.

There she stood, Donaldson's guardian angel, and sung with him.

She had a sorrowful, white face, clearly and strongly drawn ; she stood almost as still as a statue, one slender, bare arm hanging by her side, the other raised to the book on the stand, her tall figure draped in clinging china crape of the softest white. He sat at the piano, pressing the sound of the instrument with his long fingers, and lifting his face towards her as she sung. He looked then fair and almost handsome, and his voice had a pathos in it that would have sent a thrill through the most unsensitive heart.

"I would like to save that fellow!" Mac thought. He looked at the white arm against the white dress ; "that wasn't strong enough to hold him!" he said, estimating its strength by the power he knew it would have over himself had it been his Jessie's ; "that wasn't strong enough!"

He doubted his own influence ; it seemed weak as water in comparison to hers.

"But I'll make a fight for him!" he said, registering an inward vow to allow no self-indulgence on his own part to make him weaker.

The song ceased. Mac turned to the parents and spoke to them for a short time. The two at the other end of the room turned over a few leaves, but sung no more.

"I wonder if they'll ever sing together again?" Mac asked himself, as Donaldson rose, evidently with the intention of leaving.

The lovers had probably bade each other farewell earlier in the day.

She stayed by the piano while he came into the front room, and shook hands with the parents.

Mac shook hands also, and both turned to leave. Donaldson went back to the piano, kissed his good angel as quietly as if she had been his sister, and went away.

The woman who loved him advanced a step or two towards Mac, who was about to wish her good-bye.

She laid a hand on Mac's, it was cold as statuary marble.

" You will do your utmost ? " she asked.

There was the sound of chronic heart-break in her voice.

" I will," said Mac, pressing the cold hand with deep feeling.

The sorrowful white face was suddenly covered with a burning blush.

" I could hardly keep him here until you came," she said, her voice husky with shame and tears.

" I will do my utmost," said Mac, greatly moved. " I must go ; " he went on, and with a hurried bow he left, and caught Donaldson, before he had quite time to reach the hall door.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CRUISE OF THE “FIRE-FLY.”

“I AM already another being,” wrote Mac in his first letter from Christiana, posted the day of the “Fire-fly’s” arrival. “The trip here has very nearly set me up again. The first salmon I catch will complete the cure.”

A week later Jessie received another letter from the banks of a stream beyond the sphere of her own very limited geographical researches.

“I caught a fifteen-pounder this morning and am consequently in the best health and spirits. How delightful it is to feel perfectly well once more! I only need a congenial companion—you, I mean—to be perfectly happy. It is a long while since I have enjoyed anything so much as to-day’s sport. Even Donaldson woke up when he saw me playing that fish, and actually helped to land him. I wish he would leave off pulling his moustache, it annoys me, sometimes almost more than I can bear, he pulls it so aimlessly.”

"Glorious weather; and so much to remind me of Birrendale and Jessie! You would laugh if you could hear me strumming 'Ye banks and braes' on the piano, in the cabin; Donaldson is teaching me music; he seems fonder of music than of anything else; he goes in for sonatas half-an-hour long when the fit takes him. The way in which he plays a pathetic movement is enough to break one's heart. My performance offers a striking contrast to his; as yet I can only use one finger, the index of my right hand; but I keep on at that one incessantly, hoping to have the tune perfect to play to you on my return."

"Had some trouble with my interesting charge last night. He had a great wish to seek a watery grave, but I was able to meet the case with such forcible physical arguments that he ultimately listened to reason."

"Donaldson all right again. Mac better than ever. Another success—another fine fish."

"Nothing left of accident but a rather ugly scar."

These were some of the remarks scattered among descriptions of scenery, nautical adventures, journeys inland, and a whole mine of wealth of endearing words and phrases.

They were not all read by Jessie at John

Harbuckle's house in Trinity Square, E.C., some found their way to her in sea-side lodgings (for the home authorities managed to effect a compromise), some followed her to a country house, one she read, for the second time, by a window looking on to Woolwich Common.

"Mac is himself again!" was the comment Jessie made on the correspondence, and Mac being again himself, of course Jessie quickly became again herself.

Thanks to Major Merriman, a considerable variety was introduced into the girls' lives, when October brought him back from an autumnal tour with his son, and Mrs. Bayliss from rather a long visit to Birrendale, which she had been compelled to take on account of certain difficulties with her tenant who would never be satisfied with anything.

Fortunately that tenant took himself off, after obtaining Mrs. Bayliss's permission to sublet Cauldknowe.

Mrs. Bayliss did not take either of the girls with her for very obvious reasons.

The consequence was that, happening to meet Mrs. Carruthers at the Manse one day, that lady asked her to lunch at Muirhead; an invitation Mrs. Bayliss very nearly declined. She would, in fact, have declined it altogether

had not Mrs. Carruthers pressed her to come in the most cordial manner possible.

So she went and had lunch with Mrs. Carruthers and half-a-dozen other women ; all the men of the party, including the Laird and Alec, having gone to some distant moors for the day's shooting.

Mrs. Bayliss discussed the latest military intelligence during her visit to Muirhead ; speaking more frequently of Woolwich than of the Tower. It was observed that she seemed in much better spirits than formerly.

As she drove back to Kirkhope in the very same trap from the “Blue-bell” in which Mac and Jessie had driven on an ever-memorable occasion, Mrs. Bayliss hardly knew whether or not she was pleased or annoyed with her visit to Muirhead ; however, that night she wrote John Harbuckle a somewhat gushing account of the affair.

But neither her business worries nor sundry local festivities could tempt Mrs. Bayliss away from her allegiance to the memory of the late Captain. As long as she was in Birrendale fresh flowers adorned his grave.

She wept very much when she left. She had no Alison with her to point out the consoling light on the English Border, so she was very depressed all the way to Carlisle. But

when she left Carlisle she put up her veil, and had anyone been with her to see, that person might have noticed that she smiled a smile with a good deal of meaning in it as she watched the shadows flitting across the sunlit Westmoreland hills.

If the heart of a widow were like the heart of a widower one might from that smile have drawn a conclusion with a certainty of its correctness ; but widows and widowers are quite different from each other, so that one must needs hesitate to interpret that meaning ; suffice it to say, that on the return of Mrs. Bayliss from Scotland Major Merriman was the very first of her visitors, and that when he came he lingered ; when he left he felt life a blank.

Now Jessie had to write to Mac pretty often, once a day, at the very least.

These young people had been wise enough not to promise daily letters (the greatest mistake possible) ; but as a matter of fact, they wrote every day and posted when a sufficient number of pages had been written. That is to say, Jessie did so, Mac, of course, was frequently unable to post.

This constant writing made heavy demands upon Jessie. Sometimes she hardly knew what to put next, and used to appeal to Alison

for news ; for, strange as it may appear, even the writers of love letters will now and then run short of ideas. In these straits Mrs. Bayliss and Major Merriman proved an unfailing source of amusement to Jessie and also to Mac, who read out such portions of Jessie's letters as referred to them to Donaldson of Langdyke.

" We lost no time in betting on the subject," wrote Mac from Stockholm ; " he bets she will ; I, she won't."

" Alison declares she will stay with uncle John. Nothing, she says, would induce her to welcome the elderly age of innocence as her father's successor. For myself," wrote Jessie, " I need scarcely say, I think Woolwich Common the most delightful place in the world. I believe Auntie secretly prefers it to Cauldknowe but obstinacy won't allow her to admit as much. When are you coming home? make haste, for military uniforms are beginning to appear lovely in my eyes."

This letter of Jessie's was followed by an enthusiastic account from Mac of some charming Swedish girls.

" And as you seem so very cheerful without me," Mac went on, " I don't mind telling you that Donaldson last night astounded me by making an original remark :

"‘I’ve come to the conclusion,’ he said, pulling away at his moustache with some degree of vigour, ‘that what I require is an interest in life. Now you, you happy beggar, you can get an interest out of anything or nothing—I’m sure I wish I could, for life bores me unutterably. I’ve had enough of the North ; it’s getting cold, let’s go to Africa, or somewhere else in the tropics. I’ve never been in the tropics yet; they might be interesting, and are sure to be warm. Let us go at once. I should feel better if I were thoroughly warm.’ So I felt it a dreadful disappointment at first, as I had been looking forward to seeing you again very soon ; but, you know, I could only have been with you a few hours after all ; and I really believe Donaldson is much better away from home. I don’t suppose we shall be away long, and it’s all business to me—all in the day’s work, I tell myself; so it really is bringing me nearer to you. Still I am terribly disappointed. I should like you to see me now. I am so weather-beaten you would hardly recognize me. Donaldson isn’t—he’s on the sofa in the cabin the greater part of the day. His laziness is simply inconceivable—he can do nothing by the week together.”

“Off Hâvre.—It is frightful to be so near

and not to be able to run across the Channel to look at you. But it won't do. The woman who might attract Langdyke to town is in Italy, so he won't go to London and I daren't leave him. I am like the boy who stood on the burning deck, I must stand to my post at all hazards; but how I hunger for a sight of my Jessie, words will not express! Why did you abuse me so in your last letter?—etc., etc., etc."

"Madeira.—If you and your father are going to spend the winter here, how I wish would come at once! How delightful it you would be if you were here."

"Teneriffe.—Having heard so much of the beauty of Spanish girls, and knowing they were Spanish here, I resolved to look with a critical eye. They were all hideous to my mind. Thought how well someone I knew would look in a mantilla, so bought one. Donaldson, in a Byronic mood, wrote off not such a bad copy of lurid verses last night, I was incited to scribble also, but my style is not lurid. All I could think of was to rhyme 'gowans' and 'rowans;' but a little refrain that had been knocking about in my brain for some time struck me as worth preserving:

"And Jessie with the rowans in her hair."

"Perhaps Alison will be kind enough to write

the rest of the song, which I feel ought to be a very good one, for me. I suppose it was the rose that accompanies the mantilla that suggested that charming line. I suppose I mean to convey that I should prefer the beauty of the brae with a bunch of rowan berries in her hair to—" and so on.

"Off Sierra Leone.—Had a most awful fright the night before last. Was sound asleep on the deck when suddenly there was a yell. I started up in alarm, just in time to see Donaldson spring over-board. Had a boat after him at once, wonder the sharks did not get him, as the water was full of them; managed to save him, but not without difficulty. I wish I could lock him up."

"The Cape.--Donaldson very penitent. Wants to land and go up the country. The scar on my forehead has been giving me some trouble lately. You see how I am keeping my promise. Really, it is only a little lump, not worth mentioning."

"So your father is suffering from the English winter! What a pity you both don't come out to Madeira! How very jolly it would be if you did. We would return to that heavenly island at once, and you could both of you cruise about with us. I am growing dull for want of seeing you."

Another letter or two, in which Mac tried to make Jessie understand what the tropics were like, and then longer intervals of silence.

Then a letter full of the beauty of the Philippine Islands, and nothing about himself. "Why do you never mention yourself now? Why have you dropped yourself out of your letters?" Jessie asked in her reply. Then another considerable interval and a letter from Honolulu.

"I have just met an English doctor here. He strongly urges my immediate return. He thinks I ought to have further advice about that eye" (was it by accident or purpose he wrote "eye" instead of "forehead?") "Donaldson is deeply aggrieved and hurt by my proposing to leave him. However, I have found an old school-fellow here who will be only too glad to take my place. I shall start as soon as possible—I tell you the truth, I am heartily sick of my charge; although much of the cruise has been most enjoyable. I imagine there cannot be much the matter with me, as I am feeling exceedingly well and as strong as ever. I hope a very little of the right sort of advice will put all straight. To me, by far the worst part of the business is, that I can't help fearing that my darling Jessie will take alarm. I almost wish she had not made me

promise to tell her everything. What can I say to keep her from being frightened? I'm not frightened at all myself; because I am taking any mischief that might possibly have arisen so very much in time. The only pain worth speaking of that I feel is, the knowledge that my dearest girl will worry herself; which, if she loves her poor old Mac, she is not to do. You will not get this letter many hours before you see me. Donaldson wishes to bring me back in the 'Fire-fly' but the yacht can't do the journey in the time of the mail. Donaldson and I have not parted finally. He says I have done him good; I wish I could hope I had, poor fellow, for the sake of the woman who loves him as well as for his own. There are times when I feel to like him." Then came a few words not to be scanned by any eyes except Jessie's.

Poor Jessie!—poor Mac!

## CHAPTER XI.

### M A C   C O M E S   B A C K.

MAC'S whereabouts was so uncertain that Jessie never knew by what mail to expect a letter from him.

That letter about his immediate return arrived on a Saturday night by the last post.

The girls had been to Richmond with Arthur Bayliss, and both came home very tired.

“ Why wait up for the last post ? ” said Alison, “ nothing ever comes by the last post on Saturday except circulars or bills ; it never brings anything interesting. Come, Jessie, I'm thoroughly tired out.”

“ So am I, but I must wait,” said Jessie, burying her head in the pillow of the drawing-room sofa ; “ I didn't hear from Mac last week, and in his last letter he never said a word about himself. I'm afraid something must be the matter.”

“ Oh, you would have been sure to have heard if there had been anything wrong. Ill news flies apace ! ” yawned Alison from the

opposite pillow, and in a another minute she had fallen asleep.

But Jessie did not sleep, she listened to every sound, and thought of that stroll with Mac in the Tower Gardens now nearly six months ago.

After a while there was the loud rat-rat with the heavy knocker, which no one except the postman ever used.

Jessie sprang up, watched Sarah Jane go downstairs, waylaid her by the baize door, and looked over the letters.

She had not waited up in vain ; among the circulars and business letters was one in foreign paper for her.

She ran up with it to her own room, tore it open, hastily looked through it, and then let it drop from her fingers on to the floor.

Alison, coming sleepily into the room a few minutes afterwards, found Jessie sitting by the bed-side, gazing straight before her, with the thin pages lying at her feet.

“Jessie ! ” she exclaimed, suddenly waking up ; “Jessie ! what’s the matter ? ”

Jessie gave one little cry.

“Oh ! Mac’s very ill ! —he’s going to die ! ”

“No, dear, I hope not,” said Alison, putting her arms round Jessie. “Let me see the letter —here,” and she stooped to pick it up ; “let me hear about it.”

"What can it mean?—oh, surely something very horrible!" said Jessie, when she had managed to get through the passage in which Mac spoke of his immediate return. "What can it mean?—why must he hurry home?"

"Probably it's only the local injury," said Alison, trying to put the best face on the matter. "He says he feels well; it is merely the local injury that requires advice. But he will be back again directly; don't frighten yourself too much until you know what is the matter."

"I don't think I am frightened," said Jessie, with sudden calmness, "only I'm certain he's going to die."

"That's simple folly," said Alison, "there is nothing in his letter to——"

"I am certain of it," said Jessie, much too quietly.

"But you know, darling, you have had so many fancies that have not come true," put in Alison.

"This is no fancy," reiterated Jessie. "He is going to die."

"So are we all," said Alison.

"Aye! but not at twenty-five," said Jessie.

"Why should you think so? such wonderful things are done in these days; and he's strong and well. Come, Jessie, you can make mistakes

sometimes. How wrong you were about him when he didn't come that day he had promised to be here at eleven!"

"I was wrong then!" said Jessie, with a bitter twinge of self-reproach.

"I mention it, to show you that you *are* now and then capable of forming wrong conclusions. You shouldn't jump at ideas and think them certainties."

"I was wrong there!" repeated Jessie, as if the thought had now brought her some slight comfort.

"Of course you were!" said Alison, with decision; "and you very often are wrong. Remember, too, that nothing will pain Mac half so much, as seeing you look distressed."

"*That* he won't see," said Jessie, firmly. "How soon can he get home? Go and ask uncle John how soon Mac can get home. Go quickly, Alie."

Alison went downstairs with a very grave face. John Harbuckle and his sister were sitting by the fire. It was late April again now, but the nights were still chilly.

"This looks like a serious business," said John Harbuckle, with even more of his usual slowness of speech, when Alison had told the news.

"I'm afraid it is so," said Alison.

Mrs. Bayliss, who still wore her white cap, looked across at Alison with a very set face, but was silent.

"How soon can he get home?" asked Alison.

"On Monday, I should say," replied uncle John. "Dear, dear, dear me! I'm very deeply grieved--very deeply grieved!"

"You *do* think it looks serious, then?" asked Alison, under her voice.

"Most decidedly!"

"I'm so sorry for Jessie!" sighed Alison, "she has made up her mind he is going to die."

"She shouldn't do that," said uncle John; "no, she shouldn't do that. She has no warrant for that."

"May I tell her so?" asked Alison.

"By all means," said John Harbuckle, with emphasis.

"Good-night, mother," said Alison, with a kiss.

"Good-night, my sweet child," said Mrs. Bayliss, pressing her daughter to her with most unusual tenderness. "Good-night; try to comfort poor Jessie if you can. God bless you, dear."

"What did they say?" asked Jessie, as soon as Alison re-entered the room.

“Uncle John thinks you may expect Mac on Monday, that is, he may be in England on Monday; and that you are taking far too gloomy a view of the matter.”

“Perhaps I am then,” said Jessie, as if hardly daring to cherish the returning hope, whose fair face, she could not help feeling, was trying to peep round the corner of her heart.

“At any rate,” said Alison, “I would, if I were you, wait until he had heard a physician’s verdict.”

“I don’t believe in doctors,” said Jessie; “besides, they never tell one anything. It must be something very serious or they wouldn’t hurry him back so. Can he be going blind, do you think?”

“Oh, Jessie, darling! what’s the use of talking at random?” said Alison.

“I’ll try to wait patiently,” said Jessie, and was silent: a fervent “Good-night” was all the girls uttered again that day.

They were both a long while going to sleep. All sorts of distorted images of Mac crowded Jessie’s mind during the night; when the early bells awoke her on Sunday morning she was weary and unrefreshed.

Arthur Bayliss came round to breakfast.

“An ugly affair,” he remarked to John

Harbuckle, who told him the news, “ I heartily wish that engagement were broken off ; mark me, it will never come to any good. It will only be a source of continual worry to Jessie. I shall break it off if I possibly can.”

“ You won’t tell her so, I presume ! ” said John Harbuckle, with some asperity.

“ No, I’ll just see how things are likely to go first ; but I’m not going to allow her life to be entirely ruined. It is a lovely day, I’ll take the girls to church in the country somewhere. Have you a ‘ Bradshaw ? ’ — I’ll look out the trains ; you and Mary will come with us ? ”

“ Thank you, I am already engaged—it is my turn to address our school ; as for Mary, here she is to answer for herself.”

There was a curtness in John Harbuckle’s speech that revealed a certain ill-concealed displeasure.

Mary did not chose to go ; the two men said but little to each other, and Arthur Bayliss hurried off the girls as soon as possible to Fenchurch Street Station.

They went to service at a rustic little church in a remote Essex village.

The sun shone so brightly upon the glistening ivy that waved about the windows, and all secmed so happy and peaceful that Jessie took heart, and called herself very foolish for

thinking such gloomy thoughts the night before.

After the service they strolled about the lanes between the budding hedges and looked across the clear, smokeless country ; and Jessie was glad, feeling that Mac was every moment coming nearer and nearer, and that to-morrow she should see him.

After all, what was there in that letter to warrant so much alarm ?

Later in the day, while Jessie was still in the remote Essex village, Mac was being whirled through the lovelier Kentish country at express rate.

His original intention had been to see an eminent surgeon, who had been strongly recommended to him, and to know his opinion before seeing Jessie ; but finding himself in London at a comparatively early hour of the evening, he could not resist going in search of her, as soon as he had secured a room at a great hotel near the Ludgate Hill Terminus, and had made himself presentable.

The church bells were ringing by that time for evening service ; but he thought if he took a cab and drove quickly through the empty streets he might possibly find her still at home.

He had been feeling very sad all day long.

The excitement of this last hurrying to meet Jessie cheered him up, he could only think that in a few minutes he should see her, should hear her voice.

As he turned the kink at the end of Eastcheap and once more saw the historic Tower Street, with its narrow strip of blue and, on this Sunday, clear sky above its two rows of dingy houses, and the turrets of the White Tower filling all the space at the other end, as he drove along the thoroughfare that from time immemorial has led down to London's great fortress, he felt he was again to be with her, and all the fear of many days and nights flew away as he thought in how few minutes he was again to see her.

He sprang briskly from the cab as soon as it stopped at the well-remembered spot, paid the driver, and pulled vehemently at the bell.

The square was perfectly deserted ; as he waited impatiently at the door, it struck him that a creature with so much vitality as Jessie could not possibly be there, all seemed then so dead, in spite of the tender young verdure of the trees.

He was impatient ; he felt he was late, perhaps too late ; that if he were disappointed, he should hardly know how to bear it.

Presently half the heavy double-door was

cautiously opened by Mrs. Robbins's third successor.

No one was at home. Mr. Bayliss had taken the young ladies into the country, Mrs. Bayliss had gone to church, Mr. Harbuckle had gone to some mission at the back of the Mint. Was he Mr. Carruthers? Because Mr. Harbuckle had given orders that he was to be asked to stop, if he were.

"Thanks," said Mac; "will he be late?"

"Oh, no; and the young ladies was to be in about eight."

"Then I'll come back; I'll take a stroll and come back," said Mac, and turned away with a most horrible feeling of heart-sickness.

He had turned mechanically into Catherine Court before he knew well what he was doing.

He had nerved himself up to seeing Jessie, with the full intention of telling her what was the matter; but she had not been there to hear it.

There was no one to see him in Catherine Court; he paced up and down for some time and a strange horror fell upon him.

Now Mac was naturally as brave a young fellow as ever breathed. Had he been the helmsman of a burning vessel, he would have stood at his post to the very last; it was in him to do that sort of thing.

For the last six weeks or more the surgeon's knife had been constantly before his mind's eye ; but he had accustomed himself to look at it without flinching ; but many and many a time when Jessie's face rose before him, between him and that keen blade, he had put his hands before his eyes, to hide the vision ; it brought with it a dread that made him tremble to his very heart's core.

After he had taken several turns along Catherine Court, he paused under the weather-worn iron-work at its entrance and gazed at Tower Hill and the great building below it.

“ How many brave men have faced death here ? ” he thought. “ It looks all so fair and calm now ; what sights it has witnessed ! Ah ! but it was not the death out here that was so terrible ; it was the parting down yonder ! ”

He had met with a book on board the mail steamer, in which was a touching account of the parting between Dr. Cameron, the last Jacobite executed in London, and his wife. It had greatly affected Mac at the time he read it. The scene recurred to his mind as he looked towards the Tower.

When the time had come for the wife to leave her husband for ever, she threw herself at his feet in an agony of tears ; “ Madam,”

said he, trying to raise her, “this is not what you promised me.”

Those words had haunted Mac ever since he had read them. He knew, poor fellow, only too well, why.

And yet, he seemed well and strong and weather-beaten. The black patch was gone from his forehead; there was merely a slight discolouration near the left eye at a little distance from where the patch had been.

He turned away from the Tower; again went through Catherine Court, passed between the tall walls, heard the echo of his own footfall in the stillness, and strolled into Seething Lane.

St. Olave’s was lighted up for service; the swell of the organ came across the church-yard. He went by it, remembering, however, that it was there, under that black Gate of the Dead, Jessie had seen her father.

He turned round into Hart Street, by the side of St. Olave’s; he walked slowly and sadly past the church door along the silent street between the deserted houses; there was not a sound besides his own step.

Again there was the swell of the organ, and through the still air arose the clear chant of the full-voiced choir and the familiar response:

“The Lord’s name be praised.”

Mac heard every word distinctly. The words made him long, with a sudden rush of emotion, that his mother were not in her Indian grave, but with him in some quiet place where he might throw himself upon her breast and weep.

He turned ; he could go no farther. He went back to John Harbuckle's house.

A scarlet coat was at the door, its wearer was gossiping with Mrs. Robins's third successor ; Mac simply remarked that he would go in and wait for Mr. Harbuckle.

He found his way unattended to that room which had grown to him so dear, the room that used to be John Harbuckle's den, and there he lay down wearily on the sofa.

The room seemed very desolate in the fast gathering twilight. He looked towards the window where he and Jessie had sat together, and then turned his face to the wall.

He would have to be brave when Jessie came back he knew very well, but he felt weak enough then.

And yet, through all the weakness and horror, that chant, with its rich modulation, rose up continually : "The Lord's name be praised."

What did it mean ? Was that the fore-shad owing of their rejoicing when this

calamity should be over-past (Mac had learned much Scripture from his Scotch aunt); or was it to be like the words of Job: "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Mean what it might, Mac heard it over and over again as he waited there, heard it rising and falling: "The Lord's name be praised."

It grew very nearly dark. No one had thought of lighting the lamps; Mac dropped off into a doze.

Presently he awoke with a start. There were voices on the stairs. He hurried to the door. He heard Jessie calling, oh, so gaily: "Mac! Mac! Where are you, Mac?"

He hurried down the stairs and caught her in his arms just as she passed the baize door.

It was too dark for them to see each other.

"Oh, Jessie, Jessie! What a time you've been!" cried Mac, kissing her many times over, in a tumult of delight. "How glad I am you've come so soon!"

"This is good," cried Jessie. "I didn't expect you until to-morrow! I'm so glad you've come, Mac! But we mustn't block up the stairs like this. Let us go into the dining-room, and"—and they went on.

"What! no light! Let us ring for the lights, and then I'll be able to see you, Mac."

“ Oh, wait awhile, please, Jessie,” said Mac, half as in play, but with a certain something else under his tone. “ Bide a wee, Jessie ; let’s have a little talk first before the lights come. How are you, darling? Sit down here and tell me.”

“ I’m as well as well !” cried Jessie, gaily. “ And you ?”

“ Oh ! I’m all right, except for a little lump near my left eye ; that’s all,” said Mac.

“ Mac,” said Jessie, gravely, “ was that why you didn’t wish for the light ?”

“ To tell you the truth it has not added to my beauty,” said Mac, with an attempt at carelessness.

“ Mac, dear,” said, Jessie, putting her hand on his quite calmly and firmly, but with infinite tenderness, as they sat side by side in the nearly dark room, “ don’t be afraid of frightening me. Tell me at once what is the matter. I am not going to be foolish. Tell me, Mac.”

Mac drew a long breath.

“ I haven’t been to the doctor yet,” he said, checking himself in time to prevent using the word surgeon. “ As I haven’t yet seen the doctor, I can’t tell how it will turn out ; but there’s just a wee lump and a slight discolouration, that’s all.”

“That may mean a great deal,” said Jessie, gravely.

“Why, yes,” said Mac, without any alteration in his voice ; “it doesn’t seem much ; but it means *cancer*.”

They sat in the darkness, hand in hand for a moment or two, and Mac felt that Jessie was very near to him. Neither of them spoke ; but Jessie could see that dreadful last word of Mac’s written in great burning letters everywhere.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THEY TRY TO LOSE THEMSELVES.

IT was only for a few minutes that Mac and Jessie sat together in the deep twilight, silent, but feeling each other near; then the others came in, the lamp was lighted, Mac was hospitably welcomed, and not a word was said by any of them about the cause of his return.

He did not stay late; Jessie went down to the door with him, he promised her that she should know his fate as soon as he knew it himself.

The next day was very long to Jessie, although she filled it as full as possible with work, hardly daring to leave off for a moment.

Mac came again in the afternoon. He had seen the surgeon; he told Jessie the result of the interview in a very few sentences.

“He said: ‘I must operate immediately.’”

“I asked, ‘How soon.’”

“He replied, ‘To-morrow.’”

“I thought of the Muirhead people, and

said they could hardly get to London by then."

"‘I’ll give you until the following day, then.’”

So I agreed, and sent them a telegram ; but I shall not put it off for them. He thinks I shall be all right again very soon. It’s not going to make me ill, you know, Jessie ; only I wish it were to be to-morrow instead of the day after, but I thought the others would feel aggrieved if I did not give them due notice.”

“Are they fond of you ?” asked Jessie, wistfully, looking into his face.

“I think they are,” said Mac, in a tone that said he was sure they were.

Jessie felt that she was sorry for them, in spite of the persistency with which Mrs. Carruthers would not see the engagement.

“What are we going to do with ourselves all day to-morrow, Mac ?” she asked, gravely, but quite calmly.

“I can come here and talk to you,” replied Mac, “or we can go out for a walk, or—perhaps I ought to know what the Muirhead people are going to do before we arrange anything. I daresay there is a telegram waiting for me at the hotel. I shouldn’t wonder if my uncle doesn’t come by to-night’s mail, he never loses an opportunity of doing so if he can find even the shadow of an excuse. If he

comes I shall have him on my hands at least all the forenoon ; ‘ It is my duty and I will,’ as Captain Reece, commander of the ‘ Mantelpiece,’ so finely puts it.”

“ Then it will be ever so late before you get here ?”

“ Oh no, it won’t be ; I’ll walk him round to his club as early as I can ; you’ll see I shall be here very soon after lunch ; and then, if you will tolerate me for the rest of the day, why here I will stay, unless you like to take me out into the City and lose me. Ah, happy thought, let us go out and lose ourselves among those curious passages where your young men in the tea-trade run to and fro—by-the-bye, Jessie, you have never pointed that young man you so earnestly wish me to resemble out to me. Let’s go and look for him to-morrow ! What do you say ?”

“ Very well,” said Jessie, quite gaily, “ only we must get out early or he’ll be gone.” And then they both began talking about all sorts of ridiculous things ; but when Alison presently came in, Jessie did not let her go away again, but made her sit next to her, quite close, and put her hand within her cousin’s, and her hand was icy cold.

Events proved that Mac understood his uncle very well. The Laird came to town by

the night mail ; Mrs. Carruthers was to follow during the day ; for, although a most affectionate couple, they rarely travelled to town together, the Laird objecting to wasting a day and his wife refusing to give up her night's rest.

"And Alec ?" asked Mac of his uncle, after the first greetings were over.

"He'll go to the Dryfesdales for a week or so," replied Mrs. Carruthers. "I told him we should bring you back with us about the end of that time. The poor boy is needing you very much ; so he says."

It was about mid-day when Mac succeeded in leaving his uncle at the club.

He at once went down to Trinity Square, after which he and the two girls—for in spite of the merry way in which both Mac and Jessie talked, they seemed strangely averse to being left alone—he and the two girls walked briskly up and down the business lanes and in and out of the fine new covered passages, all shining with glazed tiles, and tried very hard to lose themselves in the crowd around the Commercial Sale Rooms and various other places of resort. It was a fine bright afternoon, everyone looked very much alive, and the busy City was at its busiest. They could not help feeling how much alive and how

busy it all was ; but it was in vain they tried to lose themselves, they could not.

Among other audacities they actually went into Fenchurch Avenue, and, heedless of the “Arnold Birkett” on the door, invaded the offices of Jessie’s father.

And Jessie’s father sprang up at once from his letters, as if wonderfully delighted to see them, and the pleasant and recognizable light flew over his face, as the three young people all burst out laughing at their own boldness in having, as Jessie said, “bearded the African lion in his den.”

And Jessie’s father, to mark the fortunate occurrence, produced a bottle of champagne from some private hiding place (Heidsick’s Dry Monopole it was), and asked them if they would not come upstairs and drink it.

They all thought it the finest fun in the world to go up the wide, airy staircase to Arthur Bayliss’s well-lighted rooms.

“And,” exclaimed Alison, as they entered, “now, I know, where so much of uncle John’s old furniture goes to ! Why what a treasure this large room must be to him ! And a balcony too !—of all delights in the world-- a balcony !

“The very thing I’ve been longing for all my life !” exclaimed Jessie, stepping out

on to it and looking up and down the Avenue.

Then Arthur Bayliss went to that sideboard which he had purchased from the “rejuiced party” over the water, and found glasses; and they managed to finish that bottle of Heidsick before Arthur Bayliss thought it was so nearly post time that he really must go and get his letters finished.

“And I say,” said Mac to Jessie, as they left the exceedingly modern Fenchurch Avenue, “your father is a most uncommonly jolly person, and the City is a most uncommonly jolly place! By Jove, it is!”

So they managed to pass the afternoon; in the evening they did what was for them quite an unusual thing, they opened the piano and played and sang.

It was Mac who opened the instrument. “Oh, Jessie,” he exclaimed, when they were all of them, including Arthur Bayliss and uncle John, in the drawing-room, “I’ve never played you my ‘Banks and Braes’ that Langdyke taught me.”

And with the greatest *sang-froid* he sat down to the piano, which was new and stiff, and strummed through the air, thereby inciting Alison and Jessie to sing an endless number of Scotch songs.

“Brava! bravissima!” cried Mac, patting Jessie’s hand when she at last left the piano and took her favourite place on the window-settle again. “Jessie! I never knew you could sing like that!”

“Didn’t you? Ah! you don’t know half my good qualities,” laughed Jessie.

“I’m beginning to think I don’t,” replied Mac.

To tell the truth there had been a thrill in Jessie’s voice as she sang that no one had ever heard there before. Alison, who was a most tender-hearted girl, and who loved Jessie very dearly, would have liked to have run away and had a good cry.

Mac did not stay late, he said he must go and look after his uncle, to whom he owed a sort of filial duty.

“Are you walking to Blackfriars?” asked John Harbuckle.

“I thought of doing so,” returned Mac.

“It’s a fine night,” said uncle John, “Jessie and I might as well go with you.”

“Thanks, if Jessie is not tired,” said Mac.

“Tired, oh, no,” said Jessie, “I’ll have my hat on in a minute.”

So the three went to Blackfriars, John Harbuckle talking all the time, in a calm undertone, of the streets they passed along

and of the people who, during the day, cupied the silent houses.

They paused an instant at the door of an hotel so foreign-looking that if the moonlight had not shown the familiar Thames, they might well have fancied themselves in some Continental town.

“Well, good-night to you,” said John Harbuckle, shaking hands with Mac.

“Good-night, and many thanks,” returned Mac. “Good-night, Jessie, darling.”

“Good-night, Mac, dear.”

A quiet kiss and Mac Carruthers was gone.

John Harbuckle, who had turned his head, espied a cab. He beckoned to the man, opened the door; Jessie got in, John Harbuckle following as soon as he had simply uttered the words, “Trinity Square.”

When they had driven a few yards Jessie put her hand within his and said, with a piteous little gasp and a shudder:

“Oh, uncle John!”

He held her hand all the way back, but she never spoke another syllable, and he could say nothing.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AN INTERLUDE.

“**M**OST satisfactory !”

“ Doing as well as possible ! ”

These were the reports John Harbuckle brought back when he went to inquire after Mac the next evening and the following day.

After that notes to the same effect came in Mac’s own hand.

It was an immense relief to all concerned. At Trinity Square they felt that they could again breathe more freely.

Jessie was quite certain she had never been so perfectly happy before in her life.

The reaction brought with it a buoyant hopefulness that was in itself an almost ecstatic delight.

Jessie was as sure now that Mac was going to get well again very soon, as she had been certain he was going to die.

“ I shall be able to drive round on Sunday,” Mac wrote towards the end of the week, “ I

will stay an hour ; but no one must ask me to stay longer."

It was quite wonderful to Jessie that Mac should be able to come out again so soon ; but Mac was so young and strong, he could get over things so easily.

While the people in the old house in Trinity Square are waiting in this happy mood, I will, in order to pass the time profitably and also to throw some light on an interesting subject, record a circumstance that took place in the drawing-room of John Harbuckle's house in the November of the preceding year ; about the time that Mac Carruthers and Donaldson of Langdyke were cruising off Madeira.

You will remember that Jessie, when writing to Mac, had alluded to the frequent visits of a Major Merriman.

The young men on board the "Fire-fly" being—as young men at sea often are—hard up for something to do, had betted on the affair, even so long ago as when the "Fire-fly" was off Stockholm.

"He bets she will ; I, she won't," wrote Mac.

The visits of the Major had been interrupted by Mrs. Bayliss's visit to her "place in Scotland ;" for by this term, which allows the hearer's imagination such ample space to work in, she now always spoke of Cauldknowe.

The Major was her very first visitor on her return.

Here is a little scene which occurred not long afterwards—within, to be quite accurate, ten days after her leaving Birrendale and the grave beside the wild stream, that was still rushing down to the Solway.

She had wept very bitterly as she crossed the level plains by the Firth's side ; there had been no Alison to cheer her, to point out the fair light on the English border.

But south of Carlisle, she had smiled a smile full of meaning. The question now to be considered is : What was that meaning ?

If you could know, consider this little scene :

It was late in the afternoon. John Harbuckle's Wedgwood tray was still on the slender-legged table ; empty tea-cups stood here and there about the room on various pieces of furniture. Mrs. Bayliss, Major Merriman, and the girls were also scattered here and there ; Mary, still in her widow's cap, occupying a low chair by the fire (for the day was cold), the Major upon a corner of the sofa, by her ; Alison was nearly opposite them, at the table in the centre of the room, Jessie between them and one of the windows.

The Major had arrived at four o'clock, it was nearly six now ; but still he lingered.

Mary and the girls had each done quite a long piece of knitting since he had been there.

Presently it struck the hour. The girls rose ; it was time to think of dressing for dinner. They slipped away.

The Major rose, opened the door for them, and returned, but not to the sofa.

He took up a position on the hearth-rug, and observed, accompanying his words with several of those little shrugs and arranging of garments by which a man indicates that he is about to depart :

“ Ahem ! It is time for me to be going ! ”

When he had made this remark, commonplace enough, there fell a dead silence on them both. There was a very long pause, during which the Major screwed the top button of his coat as far round as it would go without coming off. When he had screwed one way, he screwed it the other.

“ Ah ! It is time for me to be going ! ” he repeated ; but he lingered still.

“ Are you obliged to hurry away ? ” asked Mrs. Bayliss, calmly, very calmly, and without looking up from her knitting.

“ Why, yes,” said the Major, nervously.

They had been talking about poor Emma and poor Bayliss, they had been showing each other portraits ; the time had not seemed long

to—yes, I think I must say it—to either of them.

The Major's fingers clutched at the jet guard to which was attached the locket containing his late wife's hair and likeness. He sighed deeply:

"I must go ;" then he stopped a moment or two. "But when I leave here there is always such a blank," he said, with simple pathos.

He looked down at Mrs. Bayliss, she seemed to him a fair sympathetic creature.

"An awful blank," he repeated.

Again there was a dead silence.

"You know what I mean, you have felt the same," he said, after a very speaking pause.

"I do still," murmured the widow.

"An awful blank," reiterated the widower.  
"Could you not fill it ?"

Another pause, longer, more impressive.

"That is impossible," said Mary Bayliss, gravely, still looking down at her knitting.

"Of course the past is passed, in—in a sense," said the Major, "but still—yes—I am sure you *could* fill it, if—if you would be—if you could bring your mind to accept such a task."

Mary Bayliss laid her knitting down on her lap, she crossed the hand on which was her

wedding ring over the right wrist, and she looked up steadily to Major Merriman.

“I thank you most sincerely for the honour you do me,” she said, with deep gravity. “If it were possible for me to accept your offer I would do so, but”—and her face suddenly became irradiated as if by some inner light, and for the moment she seemed transfigured, young and beautiful once more—“but”—touching the white crape that covered her pale hair, and speaking with indescribably clear tones full of buoyant pride and tender sorrow—“I would not exchange my widow’s cap for all the coronets in England, nor my loneliness for the devotion of the best man now living in all the world.”

Her upward glance, her firm tones all but paralyzed the little Major; he felt rooted to the spot, he gazed at her as if mesmerized, with his childlike eyes wide open.

Then the colour flew into his face, he bent his head, he looked down at the rug; Mary gazed at her wedding ring; again there was a dead silence.

Then, after a minute or two, the widower quietly advanced a step, took the widow’s hand, raised it to his lips as if it had been the Queen’s, and withdrew; gently closing the door behind him.

Mary sat still for another minute smiling at the ring, then she rose suddenly, and ran upstairs to her own room with a lightness of foot that had not been hers for many a year.

She burst into tears as soon as she had turned the key, they were the happiest tears she had shed since her long-past girlhood ; since, in fact, the day James Bayliss asked her to be his wife, in the woods that overlook Woolwich Common.

She had made a great sacrifice to the memory of her James ; how proud, how thankful she was that she had spoken that decisive sentence no pen can tell !

“James !” she exclaimed, almost as if he were really there, “I said it, James !” and she repeated that sentence word for word in a tumult of happy and sorrowful feelings.

And she *had* made a very great sacrifice : from her own point of view, the greatest sacrifice she could have made. With what pride did she now offer that sacrifice to him ! She went over each item as if each item were in itself a costly gift ; there was the little Major himself, her husband’s old comrade, whom she could have found it in her heart to like very much ; there was the house on

Woolwich Common ; the return to the dearly-beloved military life ; there was the freedom from the City she detested ; the showing Mrs. Carruthers of Muirhead that she was still an attractive woman ; there were all these things, and they all had their weight, especially the Major's own startled eyes and unspoiled face and character ; these things, I repeat, were all things she valued highly and knew she valued, but she took them all, every one of them, and threw them at the feet of her James Bayliss in a passion of delight and grief.

When her emotions had somewhat subsided she went up to her brother's den and, unannounced, walked in triumphantly ; but withal with a certain quiet dignity.

John Harbuckle was looking over a manuscript in Alison's hand-writing.

"Well, Mary!" he exclaimed, turning round quickly at something quite unusual in the way his sister touched his shoulder ; "my dearest girl, what has happened?—has he proposed?"

"He has," said Mary, emphatically ; "but I couldn't do it ; no, I couldn't do it! Ah, John!" and she smiled and shook her head, "how different, how very different a widower is from a widow!"

“Some widowers”—put in John Harbuckle, significantly—

“I’m going to stay with you, John.”

“That’s right!” exclaimed her brother. “That’s right! After all said and done, Mary, you’re a true Harbuckle; a real, true, genuine Harbuckle,” and he looked with admiration at her still bright face; “and a very good example, too, my dear!—a very good example!”

“Thank you!” laughed Mary; then her mood suddenly altering: “John,” she said, laying her hand firmly on his shoulder, “I would not change my widow’s cap for all the coronets in Europe!”

The brother and sister understood each other very much better after this.

“But,” asks someone, “didn’t she encourage the poor little Major, don’t you think?—just a little, now?”

Ah! my friend, there are depths, there are depths! Leave them alone; all I can tell you is, that Mary Bayliss refused him and was a happier woman ever after.

What I personally regret the most in the affair is that Mary’s devotion was not offered at a worthier shrine; for, to tell the truth, the late Captain James Bayliss was not much except as a husband.

“A failure! a failure, Mary; all my life I’ve been a failure!” had been the poor fellow’s dying lament.

“Never—never once in your love to me!” had been Mary’s passionate response.

But had she flirted with the Major?—Ah!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MAC AT MUIRHEAD.

IT seemed to Jessie Bayliss a very long interval between that Monday when she and Mac had tried to lose themselves and the following Sunday ; although nothing could have been more encouraging than the daily reports of Mac's progress.

“ So very successful,” said Mac in each note.

Jessie sat by the window on the Sunday afternoon, waiting for him. She did not object to his seeing her there now.

“ Poor Mac,” she said to herself, as she looked along the empty road-way ; “ no one can be too kind to him now ! Ah ! there he is ! that cab must be his.”

And she ran down to the door as the cab clattered over the stony road and broke up the Sabbath stillness of the square.

There was no need for Mac to knock or ring ; before he could do either the door was opened and he had taken Jessie in his arms.

Perhaps this sudden meeting was too much for him, Jessie felt that he was trembling violently. She looked up eagerly into his face as he bent over her ; he turned a little aside as if to hide something he hardly wished her to see, but there was no shrinking from him in Jessie's anxious eyes, she lifted one arm, drew his face nearer to her and kissed him.

Mac looked so much an invalid ; it was that shocked Jessie, not the ugly place with the gauze covering so ominously near the left eye.

"It has shaken you terribly, I'm afraid, dear," said Jessie, when, after a few words in the hall, they were sitting side by side near the fire in the dining-room. Lovers' ways had almost vanished under the pressure of calamity ; they sat side by side near the fire as if they were old married people.

"Why, yes," replied Mac, "it was enough to shake any man ; but that is only a matter of time. I feel I'm on the right road now, I'm gaining strength every hour. They are going to take me back to Birrendale with them tomorrow. I don't like going away from you, darling, because I'm afraid you will be anxious about me, but it seems the best thing to do. The Birrendale air will soon set me up again. I have a sort of longing for it. If you were

only at Cauldknowe! If we could only have another drive through the dale! But that's coming, isn't it?"

He was sitting in one of John Harbuckle's great chairs; Jessie was close beside him; she noticed that his hands, which were grasping the arms of the chair, looked pale against the dark leather, and Mac's hands used to be so brown and strong.

She felt much disposed to cry, when he turned his face to her with that wistful question, yet she answered him, brightly:

"Of course it is coming! and it may come sooner than we think, for Auntie often talks of our going to Cauldknowe."

"That would be awfully fine!" said Mac, turning to the fire and speaking without any banter. "However, whether you come or not, you will see me again very soon. I expect Donaldson will be home in a couple of months' time. I must be all right by then. I mean," he went on seriously, "while I'm at Muirhead to go in hard for political economy. My uncle has been talking to me about it. He has a good deal of local influence, you know; and if I only were not quite such a dunce as I am, he says I could be of considerable use to him when he contests Birrendale for the next election; so I suppose I shall ultimately

tumble into something ; and now I'm going in for real stiff work, I can tell you, with a view for fitting myself for whatever may turn up. I can work when I must, you know."

"I don't know," said Jessie. "But I should think that play would be your most profitable work at present."

"No fear of that when I'm near the Birren!" said Mac, with something like a flash of his old spirit "I should have liked---but it's no use wishing---I should have liked you to see me looking not quite so hideous before I went, I should have liked you to have had a more pleasant image of me in your brain. Never mind, I'll be just all right when we meet next time, Jessie. Do you always see our future in Birrendale ? Now, I always see it there; it always seems to me as if you could only be lodging here. When I take you home it will be, I hope, to Birrendale."

"But what would Mrs. Carruthers say ? "

cried Jessie.

"As she will never be asked, it will not in the least matter. Like the rest of us, she will have to submit to the inevitable. But we won't trouble ourselves about that just yet ; it will come all right ! "

"Yes, of course ; but you must bend your giant mind to getting well again, you know."

“That is precisely what I intend to do. It will turn out all right, you’ll see it will. I told you I was always the luckiest beggar in the world! If”—and his voice grew softer—“if I ever doubted it, Jessie, I can’t doubt it now.”

“Why not? Don’t you think Providence has been rather hard on you.”

“No,” said he, thoughtfully. “No, dear; because this trouble—and it’s been an awfully great trouble too—has shown me what a dear, brave girl you are, my darling. That is worth a great deal of suffering!”

“I thought you knew that before; at any rate you used to tell me, you did,” said Jessie, trying to call her merry “jokesomeness” to her aid, but withal more moved by Mac’s words than she dared to show.

“I did know it;” he said, gravely; “but not as I know it now. I think, darling, I must ask you again to forgive me that once in my life I thought it possible I could have a rival. When I think of it, it makes me feel awfully low in my own eyes.”

“But not in mine,” said Jessie, with that friendly little touch of hers on his hand.

“I wish they were not going to take me away from you,” said Mac, wrathfully; “it seems as if we were never to be together.”

"So it does," asserted Jessie. "But London won't suit you now."

"I know that," said Mac, with a thoughtfulness which seemed to Jessie so unnatural to him, that she could hardly believe he was the same Mac Carruthers with whom she had played at Cauldknowe.

"I know that," repeated Mac "and I have a feeling that health and strength are waiting for me in Birrendale, so I must go and find them, because I shall want them both if I am to work for you. If it were not for that I could not tear myself away. Jessie, Birrendale, and Buoyant Health ! that sounds well, doesn't it?—eh, Jessie ? "

"Aye, Mac ! Oh, you must go, dear ! I won't ask you to stay ; I wouldn't have you stay in London for anything in the world."

"I should say in three months or so I'd be quite strong again ; but I'll be able to run down here again in a fortnight or so, no doubt. Donaldson will be back in about three months ; but I think I'll not go out in the 'Fire-fly,' again just yet ; and, indeed, he'll probably be sick of her by now. However, I suppose I had better not look any further a-head for the present. You are going to be as merry as you used to be, Jessie ? " he asked ; "I can't bear to think I have ever cast a cloud on your

brightness. Sometimes I'm afraid I really don't deserve that you should worry about me. Do I now?"

I don't think Jessie's answer came in any form that can be put down.

But Mac had solemnly promised not to exceed that hour the doctor had allowed him and he always kept his word.

The little clock had been going on all too rapidly ; soon there was only just time to speak to the others in the next room, to say good-bye, and to go.

"Good-bye ! I'll run down as soon as I'm strong again. That won't be long ; the matter of a fortnight or so. It's been most successful, you know, really wonderfully successful !" said Mac to the family assembly as he was leaving them.

With a few affectionate additions these were also Mac's last words to Jessie.

When Jessie returned from the street-door, she heard a hum of voices ; but they were all silent as soon as she entered the room.

She knew they had been discussing Mac, and that her presence stopped them.

She said nothing, but quietly took up a Sunday book, and retreated to a corner of the sofa.

She went out for a walk with her father during the evening.

"Ugh!" he said, with a shudder, the moment Jessie took his arm; "Ugh! Poor fellow; that's a bad look-out, Jessie!"

"But it's most successful," put in Jessie, bravely, her heart sinking the while at her father's foreboding tone.

"Ah! I've gone through it!" said Arthur Bayliss, with another shudder—"know what it is! You don't. I do!"

"You!" exclaimed Jessie. "Why, you never had anything like that!"

"No, thank God! But a man who was my constant companion for many years, died of it. I saw it through, poor fellow. Ugh!"

"That was a long while ago," said Jessie. "They can do such wonderful things now-a-days, that they couldn't do then."

"So they say! Well, my dear child, of course, I don't want to depress you; but—it's a bad case, Jessie! Perhaps it is better you should be prepared for the worst."

"I won't think of that yet," said Jessie, resolutely. "The doctor says it is successful. Why shouldn't we believe him?"

Arthur Bayliss shrugged his shoulders: "These cases are very rarely successful," he said.

"I believe you don't like poor Mac, father," said Jessie, bitterly. It was not often she

spoke bitterly, but her father's manner irritated her, and her nerves had been far too overstrung when she had left home.

"My darling child, I like him very much, *per se*," returned Arthur Bayliss, in his most amiable tone; "but you must remember that I have your interest to consider, and that when I say your interest, I mean your *real* interest."

"My real interest!" echoed Jessie, wondering what interest could be real to her that did not include Mac.

"Yes, Jessie. Remember you are now all I have to live for in this world. I cannot afford to throw away, nor consent to your throwing away, the best years of the life of the only being living who is precious to me."

"Throwing them away!" exclaimed Jessie, and her father could feel her hand quivering as it lay on his arm. "Throwing them away! I would sooner"—she hesitated and her breath came and went hurriedly—"I would sooner be the widow of Mac Carruthers than the wife of any other man in the world!"

"That's a very admirable sentiment, my dear, and does you infinite credit; I can imagine your poor mother would have said the same; and, indeed Jessie, your voice sounded very much like hers as you spoke then; but, darling, this thing will have to be looked at

very practically. Now don't go and jump at absurd conclusions, and suppose I want you to be hard upon the poor fellow ; of course I don't want any such thing, but I want you to do what you do—and I feel that under existing circumstances I have, in a great measure, forfeited my paternal right over you—I want you to do what you do with your eyes open, that is all ; I should not like you to come to me afterwards and tell me you did not know what you were undertaking. I'll tell you a little about my poor friend Warrington ; I saw his case all the way through ; I've seen several others since that time."

When our relatives feel it a duty to tell us what they know will give us pain they seldom shrink from performing their task thoroughly. Arthur Bayliss had acquired during his residence abroad a morbid liking for horrors ; they had a kind of fascination for him, when he began to talk on a dreadful subject he could hardly check himself.

So the details of poor Warrington's case were related by Arthur Bayliss to his daughter with an elaboration that would at any time have been sufficiently trying to hear, the while Jessie and he walked arm in arm round Finsbury Circus.

Certainly Jessie would never at any time of

her life have to complain that she had not been warned ; that she had not had all the horrible contingencies of the position plainly set before her.

Arthur Bayliss spoke of his lost friend with a great deal of feeling. He was a man who could always command any amount of feeling, genuine, too, *au fond*.

The narrative, however, would have impressed a casual listener with more pity for Arthur Bayliss himself than for the sufferings of his friend.

In listening to Arthur Bayliss one always felt, for the moment, that no man now living had gone through a quarter of such misery as he had endured.

Jessie, poor girl, was too heart-sick to think or feel anything acutely except that, come what might, she intended to be good to Mac.

“ That’s very shocking, father,” she said, when, after they had been out more than an hour, they were again at John Harbuckle’s door ; “ it’s awfully, awfully shocking ; but the doctors know more now, and it’s been so very successful.”

So very successful ! Mac’s letters grew bright and then brighter. He felt comparatively strong and well again. He caught salmon and

trout—he sent a fine fish to Trinity Square. “I work hard and I play hard,” he wrote. “My uncle says I’ve a turn for politics and only require more knowledge. He and Alec are coaching me with great diligence and I am sticking to it with more than my usual pertinacity. I know the name of every voter in Birrendale, I verily believe.”

So very successful! It would be too painful to trace that triumphant assurance backwards through doubt, to the certainty of disappointment.

The brightness faded away again out of Mac’s letters : they grew quiet, but hopeful ; then he dropped himself and his case out of them altogether.

Jessie remembered that anecdote she had heard her father relate to Major Merriman, about the man who was washed overboard, whom they saw carried hopelessly on the waves, further and further away from all help, drowning before their very eyes without possibility of rescue.

She thought of that scene often when she thought of Mac, but she never gave up hope for him.

And Mac himself clutched hope with a death-grip. He worked at his books and lists of voters as desperately as if he were certain the

success of a long life depended upon them, and as if he were not constantly talking of the return of Donaldson of Langdyke.

"The fact is," he said to Alec, "I mean to get all Donaldson's influence for our side. He has, or ought to have, plenty of influence in the dale; so I'll just show him the way he ought to go, and he'll go, no doubt of it; if he can do it without any trouble to himself."

"Don't be too sure," said Alec; "there are other people to show him the way besides you."

"Yes," said Mac, "but I managed to get a hold over him that no one else ever had, and besides that, if he has any political opinion at all it is on our side; I'll look him up as soon as he returns. Why it would be the makimg of him if he could take an interest in any mortal thing!"

"All right," said Alec, "you try! My father has done his utmost with him; but he says, 'What permanent impression can you make on a man whose mind is just like an india-rubber ball?'"

"You'll see!" said Mac. "I'll do that little stroke of business for my uncle, at any rate."

"I hope you will, old fellow," returned Alec, significantly, "because it would make a great deal of difference to our little plans, you know."

This conversation took place one morning at the end of July in the gun-room at Muirhead, which was generally used by the young men as their study, and was, to their thinking, by far the most pleasant apartment in the house.

“Muirhead,” Alison Bayliss once observed, and she was not a bad authority on such points, “Muirhead, like the popular hymn-book of the English Church, is ancient and modern. There is an old border tower covered with ivy, and about that tower is grouped, in picturesque, irregular fashion, a large red sand-stone house, with those corner turrets in the French baronial style, with roofs exactly like extinguishers, that I so dearly love. They have large oriel windows in the old tower, and in fact, wherever they can put them. There is a great wide staircase of pitch-pine, with fine long corridors above it. They have refurnished the whole place quite recently with the Edinburgh edition of London high art, and a very charming edition it is. The old original cattle stealers who inhabited the tower were very pious in their way. There is a sort of crypt where the sacred monogram, I. H. S., is still to be seen in great letters. This makes Muirhead very interesting to me; that is, I used to think it was so

before I fell in love with the Tower of London. You will understand, I am quite sure, that I don't think much of it now, uncle John," for it was to John Harbuckle, as a matter of course, that Alison gave this brief description.

"But you should, my dear," returned John Harbuckle. "From what you tell me, I should judge Muirhead to be an exceedingly interesting example—an exceedingly interesting example of a border tower of to-day."

The gun-room was in the old tower.

On the morning of that July day, when Alec and Mac had the conversation about Donaldson, which was only a repetition of what they had often before said, Mac was sitting writing at the table and Alec was reading in the oriel, when Alec looked up from his book as suddenly as it was in his slow nature to do anything, and said, with his usual drawl :

"Mac, that will be Donaldson coming up the brae; I wonder will he be at the Dryfesdales or at Langdyke? "

## CHAPTER XV.

### OUT OF DOORS.

“DONALDSON! oh, hey!” exclaimed Mac, springing up with the greatest alacrity. “Well, he can’t have lost much time in getting over here, for the ‘Fire-fly’ was in the Mediterranean last week. It’s kind of him to come so soon. With all his faults he was always considerate,” and Mac went quickly to the window.

Muirhead stood at a good elevation above the moors around it. It was approached by a long drive that wound up the hill-side through woods of spruce and fir. Nearer the house the conifers gave place to fine specimens of those rarer trees of which the Laird was so proud.

Mac stood at the window watching Donaldson walking his horse up the ascending drive.

It was a comfort and satisfaction to him that Donaldson had sought him out so early, and poor Mac was already in that state of

mind and body in which a human being craves the notice and consideration of his fellow creatures, with a kind of hunger very real and intense; although he may hardly be able to put that craving into words. When Donaldson had nearly gone round the great circular lawn, all blazing with beds of bright flowers, Mac left the windows, went into the entrance-hall and down a few steps, and stood there waiting for Donaldson, who arrived in a moment or two.

“How are you, Carruthers?” “How are Donaldson?” exclaimed the two men, simultaneously, as they shook hands with vigour.

But before either could answer each had looked into the other’s face. Donaldson looking down from his horse, Mac looking up.

Mac looked up and two thoughts, swifter than lightning, flew through his brain; the first was :

“It’s nearly all over with him!”

But even as the change he saw in Donaldson flashed upon his mind, he noticed Donaldson turn his head quickly away from him with a slight but unmistakable gesture of horror.

He knew at once, without another sign, that it was all over between *them*. He raised his hand to his forehead, as if to shade his eyes from the sun, and asked, in his usual tone :

“Won’t you come in?”

“No,” said Donaldson, vaguely, patting his horse, “I think I won’t; I promised Dryfesdale I’d be in to lunch. I was very sorry to hear so bad an account of you, Carruthers. I thought I’d just ride over and see how you were. How are you, though?”

“As well as I’m likely to be again,” returned Mac, quite evenly. “I won’t ask how you are,” he added to himself.

“That’s a bad business! I’m awfully sorry. Had an attack of the nerves myself lately; haven’t got a nerve left.”

“Well then, you had better come in and rest,” said Mac. “Rather hot on the road to day, isn’t it?”

“Yes, hot and dusty. No, thanks, I think I can’t,” said Donaldson, uneasily; “got to be back to lunch, you see. I only came over just to ask how you were, you know. Good-bye, old fellow, good-bye,” and they shook hands again. “I say, though, I’m most awfully sorry for you, Carruthers, I’m awfully sorry for both of us, that I am. Good-bye!”

“Well, if you won’t come in, good-bye!” said Mac.

“I’ll come over again some day, when I’m not obliged to get back so early; some day, when my nerves are stronger, when I’ve got

the better of this attack. Good-bye again, old fellow!"

But although Donaldson grasped his hand with all the strength that remained to him, he did not look at Mac; neither of the men ever looked each other in the face again.

Mac stood on the steps for a few minutes watching Donaldson, as he rounded the lawn and slowly disappeared among the giant trees that hid his downward path.

He stood there on the steps beside the old border tower, where the fresh young ivy was glistening on the dark stems in the full sunshine of that July day. How brilliant was everything except his own fate! How conscious he was of its brilliancy and of his own darkness!

The warm transparent shadows of the great trees crossed each other lightly on the grass, but the shadow on his heart pressed so heavily there it seemed to be cutting it in twain.

He watched Donaldson's brown-clad figure on the bright bay horse, with its glossy coat, until it dipped beneath the hill and was lost to him. When it was out of sight he had a conviction that he should never see it more.

He was right; they never met again.

But it was not that conviction which brought the look of intense pain into Mac's face as

he stood there in the sunlight, that pain had come when he had seen Donaldson turn away from him with that slight but unmistakable shudder.

The small particular instance that caused the pain was Donaldson's gesture ; the broad and terrible truth it revealed to poor Mac was that he had become repulsive to his fellow creatures.

The simple fact was, Donaldson had turned from him. What he felt in all his being was :

“ For thee the family of man has no use ; it rejects thee ; thou art wholly as a dissevered limb.”

He could not return at once to the house ; he could not even pass the window where Alec was sitting, he walked quickly across the lawn and far into the depths of the fir plantation.

The sunshine and the rich life in all things followed him there as he paced slowly over the spongy mosses among the firs.

He only knew that Donaldson, when he had turned away from him, had but done what every other man would do, if unrestrained by kindness.

For the first time in his life he felt himself cut off from his fellows, separated even from that bright physical world all around him,

with which he had always been so closely allied.

It seemed to him more than he could bear ; but although unseen and alone he did not betray his feelings by any outward sign ; he only strolled slowly over the soft deep moss, full of dismay.

As he strolled about, his thoughts, after a while, formed themselves into some sort of order ; like this :

“Donaldson has turned from me : I am repulsive to my fellow creatures : therefore I am in honour bound not to sacrifice Jessie. It is my duty not to allow Jessie to sacrifice herself to me. I must give her up ; I must make her give me up ! ”

In the Hawaiian Archipelago, as Miss Bird tells us, and as Mac himself had seen, there rises, like a blue “morning-glory” from a bluer sea, the Lepers’ Island, Molokai. Mac had seen from the deck of the “Fire-fly” a transport, taking the lepers to their living grave, and heard the weeping of their relatives on the white coral beach. He thought of himself as one of those lepers now.

Beyond the woods he saw the broad Solway far away and a dim land beyond the Firth, lying warm in the noontide haze. He thought of Molokai, of himself and Jessie, and he said,

"I must give her up; I cannot take her with me there."

But there, below, sparkled the Birren ; he looked at it steadily, and he remembered Jessie and the happy days when they had played together, and felt that it would kill him to give her up.

Then he put his foot upon all that feeling, as he would have done on the deck of a burning ship had duty kept him at the helm. If it did kill him to give her up, what of that ? What was his life worth ?

He made up his mind to his next step and walked steadily towards the house. On the lawn he met Alec, who had evidently been looking for him. Alec, kind fellow, never shrank from him.

"I'm going south by the night mail," said Mac:

"Aye!" said Alec, taking the announcement slowly in.

"You'll be seeing the doctor again?" put in Alec, as Mac did not at once say any more.

"Probably," answered Mac ; "but I am going to see Jessie."

They were silent for a minute or so ; then Alec said :

"I'll just go along with you, Mac."

"Very well," assented Mac, with indifference.

"I'm wearying to see your Tower of London," said Alec, with a touch of *navieté*, which was, however, entirely thrown away upon his cousin.

"There'll be a row," said Mac, very seriously.

"There'll be *that*," returned Alec, with a great and decisive emphasis on the "that."

"I don't want to be drawn into it," said Mac; "I've rather more than I can stand on my own account just now."

"I'll not trouble you on that score," said Alec. "But I am just going south with you to-night."

Alec went back to the house, and straight to his father's study.

Mac still lingered out of doors.

He had told Alec he was going south; already he had taken, he thought, the first of the final steps; this was the beginning of the end.

It was hard, too hard for words to express.

"Curse God and die!" rose up in his heart.

But he did not curse God, for out from the depths of the woods and up from the shining Birren, sung by the birds and by the soft "eye-music" of the waving boughs, came to

him, clear and sweet, the full-voiced chant that had broken the silence of the London streets :

“The Lord’s name be praised.”

There was no response in his heart ; but he turned his face bravely to do what seemed to him his duty—to give up his Jessie.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SITUATION DISCUSSED.

LIFE at John Harbuckle's house in Trinity Square had, to all appearance, run on pretty evenly through the spring and summer, while Mac had been at Muirhead ; for Jessie, poor girl, if her heart rarely quite left off aching on Mac's account, troubled no one with her anxiety. She took it all very simply and sweetly. She neither shunned to speak of him, nor, even from Alison, sought continual assurances of sympathy.

A casual observer would hardly have noticed any change in her, but change there was ; Alison noticed it, John Harbuckle noticed it.

She seemed to most people as merry as ever, merrier in fact ; but she had a readier ear for any tale of suffering, and a prompter hand to help.

John Harbuckle suggested that the girls should help in the Flower Mission his church carried on in the streets behind the Mint.

Jessie found great pleasure and comfort in that work. The poorest and lowest felt the strong secret hidden behind the sympathy of her bright hazel eyes.

The sorrowful knew there was sorrow there without any revealing word.

One person, however, did a vast amount of grumbling, not only at Jessie, but at poor Mac's calamity. That person was Arthur Bayliss.

He let all the household know that in his daughter's engagement to Mac Carruthers he was, under the painful circumstances, suffering a severe personal injury, not to say injustice.

If not every day, certainly three times a week, he asked Jessie for news of Mac, and invariably shrank and shuddered at the answer. Alison knew very well that whenever she saw any tears in Jessie's eyes that she had been talking with her father.

"I shall speak to him on the subject," said Alison, one night, with indignation.

"Pray don't! Of course he means it for kindness, and he has so many things to worry him, and his own health is so very bad. He can't help it, I'm sure he can't. I'll try not to care. Don't say anything to him about it," said Jessie.

"Of course I always do what you tell me, I won't attack him, then," returned Alison.

But although she kept the letter of her promise, she may be thought, perhaps, to have broken it in the spirit, for one evening, having seen Jessie and her father off for an evening walk, she went up to John Harbuckle's den and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" said John Harbuckle; "come in, my dear, I wanted to speak to you. I was on the point of going in search of you. Have you finished another paper?"

"Not yet," said Alison, gravely and as if setting the subject altogether aside; and she looked about for a chair.

There were but two in the room, both were filled with piles of papers and curly-edged old prints.

"Wait a minute, I'll move those," said the master of the den. "I am trying to arrange them, but it's slow work, very slow work;" and clearing a little space on a crowded shelf, he put the engravings up there in a somewhat disorderly heap.

"Now, my dear, there's a chair for you! I'll have one for myself directly."

The breeze from the open window gave some little trouble, but in another couple of minutes John Harbuckle was sitting opposite

Alison in front of his blotting-pad, and with both hands on the arms of his chair, swaying himself gently backwards and forwards as if in deep meditation.

"Well, Alison," he began, after rather a long silence, "and what was it you have to discuss?"

"Jessie," returned Alison, seriously, and somewhat uneasily.

"My subject too," said John Harbuckle, still slowly moving backwards and forwards. But neither of them appeared to be able to begin the discussion of that subject.

"I suppose you have her entire confidence?" presently said John Harbuckle, in a vague and tentative sort of way. Not that he had any doubt about it, but that he suddenly felt embarrassed.

"I know Jessie very well indeed," said Alison, "a great deal better than I know myself; she is not such a complicated person."

"No one ever is to oneself so complicated a person as oneself," remarked John Harbuckle, with a slight smile, stopping his swaying movement for an instant.

"Jessie always appears to me so very simple minded," said Alison.

"Would she object to giving me her full confidence likewise?" asked John Harbuckle,

leaning forward with hands clasped, and looking down on to the Persian mat that formed the carpet of his lair.

“ Give it you ! I’m sure you have it, uncle John,” exclaimed Alison.

“ Yes, I suppose I have in most things,” said John Harbuckle, with a rather troubled smile ; “ but do you think she would like me to know exactly what her feelings are as regards that poor young fellow in the North ? You see,” he went on, gathering courage after a brief pause—“ you see, Alison, I am very fond of Jessie ; I was to have married her poor mother, you know ; I have—(I am very fond of you too, my dear, but you are my own kith and kin, that is quite different)—I have a feeling about Jessie—that she is—her mother’s child, in fact ; so intimately connected with the sole romance of my prosaic, common-place life——”

“ Common-place ! ” cried Alison.

“ Well, well, never mind, my dear. To some minds such an affection as I had for Jessie’s mother can come only once in a lifetime. Her mother is in heaven—but—she is also—in a widely differing sense—in our Jessie here. I am not wronging any one, I trust, when I tell you, but perhaps I ought not to say this”—his voice sank, he hesitated, deeply moved.

"But do say it, please," said Alison, gently ; "that is, if it is not too painful."

"I cannot think I am wronging any one—when I say—I love in our Jessie what I recognize as—Her ;" and again he paused. "I am sure," he went on, fearing that he might after all have said more than he was sure he had a right to say, "you understand me, my dear, don't you ?"

Alison bowed her head without looking up.

"The reason I have told you this," John Harbuckle went on, "is, that I want to know exactly what are Jessie's own feelings with regard to Mac Carruthers. I have laid bare to you—I have told you what I have never told to anyone else—I have not done so without pain, but I have done so that you might get Jessie to confide in me entirely ; and that, if she wished it, I might help her. Under the present sad circumstances, would it be a comfort to her if she married the poor young fellow ? "

"Don't you think it seems very hard that if he is only to live a little while they should be separated for that little while ?" asked Alison, fervently. "Oh, uncle John, she feels that very much ; you will understand her ; her father doesn't—or won't. You will understand that, just because poor Mac is ill and may die,

she wishes to be with him—while it is possible!"

"Of course she does! I was certain she did—I was certain there would be no shrinking back in her, poor darling; it has touched me very much to see her going her daily round of duty so cheerfully when I knew how her heart must be aching. She is a brave girl, Alison."

"That she is!" responded Alison. "And now what are you going to do?" she went on, suddenly falling into a most business-like tone.

"To begin with, I must have it out with Arthur Bayliss. I should have interfered before, but his health is so precarious. I must hear what he says, when I lay before him a proposition that has been growing in my mind for some time past. Don't speak to Jessie about our little talk, my dear; I hope by to-morrow or the following day I may be able to throw—supposing I say, a little light on the subject?"

"The subject being always—Jessie, I suppose!" said Alison, brightly springing up. "There now, I see you're tired of me, so I'll go and look after mother. But I tell you what it is, uncle John, if I go on living with such very romantic people much longer, you will find me one day writing a chapter with a heading

that will surprise everybody ! Don't ask me what it will be about ; I wouldn't tell you for worlds ! dearest uncle John ! " and when she had nearly reached the door she turned suddenly and bestowed on John Harbuckle such a caress as she had not given to anyone since poor Captain James Bayliss had been asleep by the Birren water.

This conversation took place, so it happened, on the evening of that brilliant day near the end of July on which Mac had wandered into the fir plantation of Muirhead, after Donaldson's visit had revealed to him a very terrible fact, which he had dimly known perhaps for some time, but which had never come home to him before.

It had become an established custom for Arthur Bayliss to walk round to Trinity Square every morning directly after breakfast. On the morning following Alison's little talk with John Harbuckle, however, Arthur Bayliss did not arrive at the usual time.

" Your father is late to day, Jessie," observed John Harbuckle, going to the window and looking along the foot-path below.

" Let us hope he is occupied with the Early Bird business," said Jessie.

" I think I'll walk round and see if he's all right," said John Harbuckle, with a thought-

fulness the sentence hardly seemed to warrant ; but John Harbuckle had a way of saying the most common-place things thoughtfully.

He took his hat and went off at once ; he never wore slippers :

“ No, no,” he had remarked, when Jessie had suggested that she should work him a pair ; “ no, no, my dear, that would never do ; I always wear boots. I’m so constitutionally lazy that if I had to change slippers for boots, I should stay in doors many a time when I now go out. I must feel that I can go out at any moment the fancy takes me.”

So Jessie had never worked those slippers.

John Harbuckle went round to Fenchurch Avenue, where he found Mr. Jim Robbins engaged in giving the finishing touch to the offices downstairs, and Mr. Jim’s master lying on the sofa upstairs, airily attired in a loose suit of fancy chintz, a huge cup of tea on a chair beside him, and the *Times* at his feet.

“ Attack ?” asked John Harbuckle.

“ More dead than alive,” groaned Bayliss. “ Find yourself a chair.”

“ Fine bright day, too !” said John Harbuckle.

“ All one to me,” said Bayliss, turning on his elbow, and stirring his tea.

“ Worse than usual ?” asked John Harbuckle.

"I don't know, I'm sure," returned Bayliss. "I'm sure to be all wrong when I've anything extra to worry about. However, this won't do; I must get into the office, dead or alive!"

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" asked John Harbuckle.

"Why, yes, you might call in at Tildesley's, and ask him to come on here at once; that will save my writing a note."

"Very well, I will do so. Anything else?"

"This will be, I expect, a very critical day with me," said Bayliss, without answering the question. "I may possibly require your advice in the evening. Can't tell how things may turn out."

"I came round to ask you when we could arrange for a little quiet conversation," said John Harbuckle; "a little quiet talk about Jessie," he added.

"Ugh! Poor, darling child! Don't mention her now! A fine thing for me, isn't it? Well, I must get up. Will you come here to dinner? Will you dine with me somewhere? Dinner will be a farce to-day for me, but one must go through the ceremony."

"No; no, thank you. Let us have a turn in the Tower Gardens this evening."

"All right. I'll be round to your place

about the usual time—that is, if I can manage it."

So they parted. John Harbuckle was by this time used to Bayliss's ways, and never hinted at home that he had thought him looking very much worse than he had ever seen him before; but he anticipated the evening meeting with a certain nervousness almost amounting to dread. Mrs. Bayliss and Jessie rallied him more than once on his extraordinary absence of mind during that day.

"What can have happened to you, uncle John?" Jessie asked, gaily, when John Harbuckle, in looking for a circular he had left on the mantel-piece, knocked over and broke a favourite little vase. Alison thought she knew, but she did not say so.

They were finishing dessert when Arthur Bayliss arrived, in a delightful frame of mind, such as they had not observed him to be in for some time past.

"Well, dearest child," he said, as he kissed his daughter, "I've had a good day; a splendid day!"

"How nice! Made your fortune and mine!"

"No, no, not quite that; but perhaps a few more such days would do it. Has uncle John told you?—I'm going to run away with him this evening."

"I haven't mentioned it yet. The fact is, you seemed so ill this morning that I thought I might perhaps have to go round to Fenchurch Avenue again, by-and-bye."

"Yes; I was feeling awful first thing to-day; but, as I've often found before, there's no medicine on earth like making money. Are you ready, Harbuckle? We're going for a turn in the Tower Gardens, Mary. Jessie, my child, you're looking prettier than ever. Good-bye, all of you, *pro tem.* We'll have some more music presently, won't we?"

"Then don't stay out too late," said Jessie, wondering at her father's unusual spirits.

He patted her soft, crinkly hair fondly and gaily, and followed John Harbuckle out of the room. Mary and the girls went to the window and saw the two men walking side by side towards the Tower Gardens.

"What can they have to discuss? Something important, I'm sure," said Mary.

"And pleasant too as well as important," said Jessie, but it never struck her that she herself was to be one of the subjects under consideration.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HIS NEW LIFE.

“**A**ND so you’ve done a good stroke of business to-day?” said John Harbuckle, as he and Arthur Bayliss went along the west side of Trinity Square.

“Tildesley and I have settled matters to-day; but, as I’ve already told you, we’ve been a long while working up to it. I had an awful night; really, I thought it was all over with me!—nothing but worry; I’m feeling a sort of reaction now. Matters stand like this”—replied Bayliss, plunging at once into a long and detailed account of his financial position.

“Supposing we go down to the wharf?” suggested John Harbuckle, as they paused an instant at the gate of the Tower Gardens.

“All right,” assented Bayliss, hurriedly, and then immediately continued his narrative with an excitement that offered a very striking contrast to his despair of that morning.

They went down to the broad wharf that

Henry the Third built a great many years ago, Bayliss talking rapidly all the time.

They walked up and down there for perhaps half-an-hour.

The high tide had only just turned, the river was still full, many vessels were slowly dropping down with the tide towards the sea ; gold shone in the western sky, silver, and a white crescent moon, in the far east.

“The question then arises,” continued Bayliss, still speaking with great rapidity, “shall it be done officially or non-officially? As for the larger firms, the whole score has, of course, been wiped off, and probably no one is much the worse by this time; but there are, I fear, smaller people who may have been seriously injured by my failure.”

“One such case has come under my own personal observation,” said Harbuckle; “a very painful case.”

“As I cannot yet pay everybody in full, perhaps, instead of the dividend I spoke of, it would be better to find out the more needy and pay them off the first. What do you say?”

“I’ll manage the affair for you, if you like,” said John Harbuckle. “It is a kind of thing that is rather in my line; I know Liverpool pretty well; or rather, I know those who do.”

“ Could you? I don’t care to show up there just yet ; and that rather inclined me towards doing it in the regular way ; but if you could spare the time it would be an immense relief to my mind ; I should then feel that we were doing our utmost. You would be conferring a favour I could scarcely have asked.”

“ Not so very much ! ” said John Harbuckle, “ I shall be obliged to be in Liverpool for some time shortly, I grieve to say, on account of that collision case. I will manage the affair for you.”

“ I begin to breathe freely once more ! ” exclaimed Bayliss, taking off his hat as if it oppressed him. “ The cloud I’ve been under so long seems all but gone! Let us take a turn in the Tower Gardens.” And after a further discussion of business details they came to the gate that faces the bonded warehouses on Tower Hill.

“ I’m rather tired,” said Bayliss, wearily, as John Harbuckle replaced the key in his pocket. “ Let us sit down on that bench.” And he and John Harbuckle sat down side by side under the acacias, and gazed at the walls and houses of the Tower as attentively as if they were looking at them.

“ And what about your daughter? ” asked Harbuckle, as he assumed his favourite atti-

tude, bending forward, with his hands between his knees.

“Ah!” sighed Bayliss, “my daughter is a great trouble to me! Not, of course, the poor child herself, because she’s all I could wish her to be; but, ugh!” and he shrugged his shoulders, “I’ve seen that sort of thing and I know what it is. I shan’t be able to stand another English winter; I ought not to have braved out the last. Somewhere about November I’ll go to the South of Europe. I fancy”—and he moved his right hand about with a series of little movements, as if he were drawing a picture in the air; John Harbuckle often recalled his expression, which was intently fixed on that aerial sketch, with a strange mixture of dreaminess and acuteness—“I fancy I shall be able to combine business with pleasure in a most satisfactory way. I’ve heard again from those people at Marseilles; there’s a fine opening there for palm oil. As soon as the winter has fairly set in I shall take Jessie abroad with me; we shall no doubt be able to enjoy ourselves very well in the health resorts of the Riviera, and I shall take care to keep Jessie out of England as long as I can. I’m sorry for the poor fellow, very sorry; but it is certainly not my duty to stand by and see my daughter sacrifice

herself. I object to the engagement *in toto* Jessie, in some delightful sub-tropical place, will no doubt find that there are other—”

“I don’t think so,” put in John Harbuckle, with great decision.

“Oh, I don’t know!” exclaimed Bayliss, his tone distinctly implying his belief in the possible fickleness of womankind.

And then he suddenly remembered that he was in the Tower Gardens.

And then John Harbuckle felt more vividly than ever—for the thought had been in his mind all the while they had been together there—that he and Arthur Bayliss were sitting under the acacias where Jessie’s mother and he had talked so contentedly on that evening when Arthur Bayliss had come and stolen her heart away.

There was a long and awkward pause. At length Bayliss said, under his voice :

“I suppose we are both thinking of the same thing.”

“I suppose we are,” assented John Harbuckle.

“I shall never be able to thank you for all your kindness to me. That will be a debt I shall never be able to pay,” said Bayliss, and there was, as John Harbuckle remembered, a something about his manner which he never could describe even to himself, but which

made him at once lose the antagonism that he until then had felt for him.

“Will you try?” he asked.

“Now you are going to nail me about Jessie,” exclaimed Bayliss, half laughing.

“Nail you! No! I am simply about to tell you something you don’t know. When—there is no need to shirk the memory now—when I thought I was about to marry Jessie’s mother, having a small sum of money at my command, I bought a couple of houses, which have since been pulled down to make way for Victoria Street. My intention was to have settled those houses on my—on Jessie’s mother. As it turned out, that was a splendid investment. I have never touched that money myself, except to lay it out. When I am gone, half of it will be for my niece, Alison, half, with your permission, for your daughter, Jessie. My will was made before your return.”

“Oh, I say, Harbuckle, that’s coals of fire with a vengeance!” exclaimed Bayliss.

“Not at all. Hear me out. I now propose, and it will make me happy if you consent, I now propose that you should allow Jessie to take her share on her marriage; with his little income and hers they might——”

“But it isn’t the money, or the want of money—that’s not the question!” cried Bayliss.

“I don’t want to see another widow about the house! I don’t want my daughter to be a hospital nurse, perhaps for years, and then a widow! Why sacrifice her youth and beauty?”

“Why, indeed!” said John Harbuckle, with much feeling.

They were silent, there came no ready answer.

“Come, Bayliss, you, if no one else, ought to know what a woman’s heart is made of,” said John Harbuckle, with a sort of compelling energy.

Arthur Bayliss was silent for a moment longer, then he suddenly rose up, and looking down on his companion asked, very distinctly, holding out his hand the while: “Would this arrangement make you happy?”

The old bachelor smiled gravely.

“Then, Harbuckle, you are the master of the situation.”

John Harbuckle shook the proffered hand very warmly, and slowly rose up from the bench beneath the acacias, and stood by the side of Arthur Bayliss. A profound silence fell upon both.

They stood on the sloped coping, looking down into the moat. It was the same spot where John Harbuckle had stood on the night of the 7th April, when the sound of Arthur Bayliss’s voice had brought back to him so

vividly all the past. Then, he had stood there looking down into the rising mists ; now, there were no mists, a school of boys was being drilled in that moat below. Then he had raised his eyes to a clear space between the four moonlighted turrets of the White Tower, where it seemed that heaven had opened, and gazing into that space so high and lifted up, he had asked himself, as in the sight of God :

“ Do I forgive ? ”

Now, all that space was filled with a sun-set glow, the pennants on the turrets shone like burnished gold, and he and Arthur Bayliss, rivals so long, were standing there, side by side, friends at last.

There was a long silence. Bayliss was the first to speak.

“ Harbuckle,” he said, with much feeling, “ I will not ask you if you forgive me, because that would be an insult to you, I know you do ; but how did you learn to forgive ? ”

“ By being myself forgiven,” replied John Harbuckle, gravely.

“ You are a good fellow ! ” said Arthur Bayliss.

The last lingering remnant of enmity between the two men had vanished ; each felt he had still much to say to the other,

much that he could say now, that he never had been able to say before.

"I am going in, I will not be long. Will you wait for me here, or come in too?" asked John Harbuckle.

"I will wait here. It is a pleasant evening. I will stroll about until you return. You won't be longer than is absolutely necessary?"

"No, I have only to put up Alison's manuscript for Woolcomb; she had not finished it when we left home."

They went down together to the gate opposite the bonded warehouses.

John Harbuckle paused there and looked up Tower Hill.

"How often," he said, almost as if to himself, "how often, on such an evening as this, have I stood here and imagined this place as one sees it represented in old prints! How often have I seen all that hill crowded with rabble, great balconies full of people, all come to see 'one small head taken off,' as Lord Lovat said. There," pointing to All Hallows', "there is the same brick tower and the same belfry that always, in the prints, overlooks that crowd. But, I think"—and he turned to his companion with an affectionate expression which had in it something that Bayliss had never seen in John Harbuckle's face before—

“the incident that has most deeply impressed itself upon my mind is, old Cardinal Fisher, walking calmly up this hill to the scaffold, repeating over and over again: ‘This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.’ Think of that Bayliss when I am gone.”

He unlocked the gate, put the key into his pocket, and turned away with a gravely happy face, and a quiet blissfulness in his heart.

Arthur Bayliss stood by the gate for some minutes watching him as, with bowed head and hands clasped behind him, John Harbuckle slowly plodded up the hill towards his home.

Bayliss watched him until he could see him no more; and then he thought of the Cardinal and his last words.

“This is life eternal,” he repeated, or rather the words repeated themselves over and over again in his heart, as he turned from the hill and the gate, and began pacing the broad straight path of the Tower Gardens above the moat; “This is life eternal! This is life eternal!”

If any one could have looked into John Harbuckle’s face as he slowly went up Tower Hill, he would have found it full of love and tenderness; the last words of the Cardinal’s

text—the Name—was in his heart, and along with it the great up-lifting secret of Forgiveness. At that moment John Harbuckle would not have felt it at all hard to lay down his life for Arthur Bayliss.

Hardly seeing the material world around him, that dear familiar world he loved so well, John Harbuckle came to his own door, and there he saw a sight that brought him back to Trinity Square in a moment. His niece, Alison, was just coming down the steps, and with her was a young man, no less important a person than Alec Carruthers ; a stranger, of course, to John Harbuckle.

“Oh, uncle John !” exclaimed Alison, brightly, she was looking a great deal prettier than John Harbuckle had ever seen her look before, “make haste upstairs, uncle John, for Jessie and Mac have some fine news to tell you. This is Mac’s cousin—Mr. Alexander Carruthers, of Muirhead, and you will be pleased to know he takes a great interest in antiquities. So I’m just going to show him that piece of old London Wall that is still left on the other side of the Square.”

“That’s right ; it may be gone directly,” said John Harbuckle. “I hope your cousin is better, Mr. Carruthers. We have all been very deeply concerned about him.”

"He's seen another man, a most eminent man, and he says it's twenty chances to one that, after another operation, he'll be just all right again," said Alec. "They didn't cut deep enough."

"That is a great relief to my mind," said John Harbuckle.

"And to mine," said Alec Carruthers. "We ought to have gone to this man at first."

"I came in to put up your manuscript for my friend Woolcomb, Alison," remarked uncle John.

"Oh, thanks! you'll find it on your study desk, I've just put it there," said Alison, who, however, never made the slightest attempt to return, in order to see the precious document safely posted.

What a thing it is to be an antiquary! Alison was, as you perceive, even more anxious to show Alec that bit of the old Wall than concerned about the due packing up of her own literature.

"Well, good-bye for the present," said John Harbuckle. "Alison, do not forget to impress upon Mr. Carruthers that this is undoubtedly the finest square in"—("Europe," he was about to say, but he checked himself)—"that is—South of Carlisle."

They all laughed. John Harbuckle withdrew

into his own house. Mary Bayliss, standing by one of the windows in the dining-room, watched Alec and Alison pass together along the fine piece of wide pavement in front of the Trinity House ; and she thought of Mrs. Carruthers of Muirhead with very great satisfaction indeed.

John Harbuckle's footstep was not light, Jessie heard it, although she and Mac were so deeply engrossed in conversation.

She flew to the drawing room door.

“ Oh, uncle John, come in !—come in ! ” she exclaimed. “ We’re just both of us mad with delight ! He’s seen another doctor, who’s going to make him just as well as ever ! ”

“ My dear child ! My dear fellow ! ” exclaimed John Harbuckle, seizing the hands of both ; for Mac had come forward directly after Jessie.

“ He’s so very confident ; he says it’s twenty to one that it will be all right again,” said Mac ; “ I’d given up all hope ; I don’t mind telling you now, that I was coming here to——”

“ You shan’t say ! ” cried Jessie. “ Oh, uncle John, he was wicked enough to think that if he came and asked me to give him up, I would !—did you ever hear of anything so horrible ! He doesn’t deserve to get well

after that!—does he?—Oh yes, he does, though!—doesn't he?"

"I should think he did, indeed!" exclaimed uncle John; "go on Mac."

"Well, on the Carlisle platform we met a man whom we hadn't seen for a long while. He was coming south; so we all went along together. He was awfully sorry for me; but he said: "Look here, old fellow, don't lose heart, my brother was just in your case a couple of years ago, and there's nothing but a slight scar left now. So he told me all about the man his brother went to, and I've been to him to-day, and he says it's twenty to one but he'll make a cure of it. I feel as if that man's words had put fresh life in me! I don't think I ever felt before what a glorious thing life is! It was so fine to be able to tell Jessie I was going to live! Wasn't it, Jessie?"

This sort of thing was too much for John Harbuckle. Mac had thrown his arm round Jessie, and she was clinging to him in a tumult of the wildest excitement. As for Mac—as for both of them, anyone could tell they had been crying.

"Well, well, well," said the old bachelor; "I'm very thankful, very thankful! You will not be leaving in a hurry, I suppose? Come up to my den before you go. I've something

to tell you that may interest you both ; but I know you can't spare any time just now. Let us say half-past nine ; fare you well, for the present."

"We really have a great deal to talk about just now," said Jessie.

"Oh, that will go on for ever ! She is a darling, isn't she, uncle John ?" Mac asked, unsteadily, and as John Harbuckle closed the door he was sure he heard a great many kisses.

John Harbuckle was a long while packing up Alison's manuscript ; he fell into a train of thoughts that he could not easily control :

"A dear girl, a dear girl, worthy to be her mother's daughter !" he said. "I hope their hope will be realized, with all my heart I hope so ; but I shall miss her ! Well, what of that ? Nothing—nothing ! Only—she is Jessie, and I shall miss her. Well, I must go and tell Bayliss !"

At last, after many delays, Alison's manuscript was put up and addressed. John Harbuckle went downstairs and out of the house without disturbing any one. He posted the paper. He turned towards the gate by which he had parted from Arthur Bayliss, he presently opened it and again entered the Tower Gardens.

He went to the bench under the acacias ; Bayliss was not there.

He passed the dark Beauchamp tower and the houses that face the green ; the windows were all sombre now, they and the pennants on the White Tower had ceased to flame in the sunset. The gold had died out of the sky—the dove's wing was deepening into that sweet transparent grey that precedes the raven's twilight. The boys had left the moat, even the soldier and his lass were gone now. The look-out of the Bell Tower at the corner, hanging against the sky like a great bird-cage, guarded a quiet solitude.

John Harbuckle, thinking of the good news he had to tell, walked along the path less slowly than usual ; but Arthur Bayliss was not to be seen anywhere about. John Harbuckle looked in at the summer-house opposite the Devereux Tower ; the ash-tree, like a fan, was spreading over its roof, but no one was there ; the sentry, pacing above the opposite bastion, within which a light glowed like a furnace, was the only living being to be seen in front of it ; behind it, the stream of life and traffic was ebbing away to its evening rest along the public road above. John Harbuckle went on, he passed the New Barracks, lighted up here and there, and the gloomy old prison lodgings

that guarded them : but he saw no other creature anywhere. “Can he have left the gardens? Hardly, I think, except to return to us ; and yet I was a long while, he may have grown tired of waiting.”

He came to the little ascending turning where Mac and Jessie had stood when Mac had wished to go along that path under the shadow of the dock warehouses, that ends in a little wilderness in which is a grave.

That was where he himself had first seen Arthur Bayliss. He looked along the path, no one was there now.

He went up the little ascending turning within a stone’s throw of the spot where he had heard the voice on the 7th of April.

“He may be in the arbour,” he thought. “It is late, though, for him to be there.”

He came near to that rustic arbour so screened from the broad roadway by elder bushes that, but for the never-ceasing hum of the great City, one might feel oneself far away in the rural provinces. He came near—the very streets seemed lulled to quiet that still evening—he came near—he saw Arthur Bayliss.

He hastened his steps ; his heart hurried its beat.

He went nearer—what was there in that

quiet form that struck John Harbuckle so cold?

He came close to him. He touched the hand, he raised the fallen head; he felt for the heart—his own stood still—he knew that other man was dead.

THE END.



## APPENDIX.

HARDLY had I finished this narrative, when, paying a visit to Tower Hill, I found that neighbourhood was entering upon a new phase of existence.

“Poor John Harbuckle!” I exclaimed, as I turned from Barking Alley into Trinity Square, “poor John Harbuckle!”

The sight that met my eyes was indeed heartrending to anyone possessed of the least particle of what my dear friend calls “the right feeling.”

The Metropolitan Railway Company, about to complete the inner circle, had just made a deep cutting for their underground line right through the gardens of the square. A gang of navvies, who had formed a rough quadrangle of loose planks, were sitting at their mid-day meal, cheered by a fire that burned in the centre.

That was several months ago.

To-day, November 8th, 1882, I again went over some of the ground described in this book.

Perhaps for the last time I saw King William’s statue standing at the junction of Cannon Street and Gracechurch Street, where Arthur Bayliss found it on his return from exile. It will not be there much longer. This familiar city landmark is to be removed very soon.

The beautiful old houses in the angle of Little Tower Street still remained untouched. There was a large tuft of grass on one of the deep-eaved roofs. Great Tower Street was already in a state of transition. The houses had been pulled down at the corner of Mincing Lane.

I turned up Mr. Pepys' Seething Lane. The old brick tower of All Hallows', Barking, was dingy as ever, but a great hoarding hid Barking Alley. A wide, new street is coming directly from King William's statue to Tower Hill, and so on to Whitechapel.

I left Barking Church-yard, found a great stack of new bricks at the corner by the bonded warehouses.

The turf of Trinity Square Gardens had been replaced and was already green again.

Opposite No. 14, Trinity Square, the house the sheriffs of London used to hire on the occasion of an execution, from the windows of which the prisoners walked on to the scaffold, and just within the Gardens, on the very spot, indeed, over which the block once stood, is now a large, square ventilating shaft, lately sunk by the Metropolitan Railway Company, its form suggesting, even to the dullest imagination, a cenotaph in memory of those who from this spot took their last look of the Tower and of this world.

A few yards further on, I came to Catherine Court. I had trembled for this court; happily, it is still spared. The old iron-work over the entrance smirked gaily in bright claret-coloured paint, quite fresh and new; the old shop rejoiced in green, heightening, by contrast, the dignity of the time-honoured brick of the early Georgian houses within.

Then I went on to the Trinity House.

There I stood and looked at the view.

Take it for all in all, is there in England, in Europe, in the whole world, anything finer? If so, where?

The day was superb; a brilliant noon in November, in which every line and every bit of colour told.

The pavement gleamed white, the fresh turf green; the children ran about in the gardens; the great Tower of London stood in the airy beauty of grey, as seen on a fine winter morning, the gold of the crowns and pennants, of Time itself,

as marked on the Tower clock, shone brightly ; a red flag floated gaily in the breeze far above the slight belfry of the church on the green ; there were masts and wreaths of steam from the river ; there were light mists among the Tower battlements ; there was the ceaseless noise and stir and clatter of traffic of the great city. How full of crowding life, and yet how wide and peaceful it all was !

Surely John Harbuckle is right, it must be “ incomparably the finest square in Europe ! ”

But one should see it on a day like this.

At length I went on a few yards, and came to a shining pitch-pine railway station, as new as new could be.

This new station is at the corner of a blind turning, at the end of which stands a weather-stained fragment of old London Wall.

I entered that Metropolitan station ; I went westwards, and great was my delight to find that on every platform we came to there was to be seen a large placard, on which was a bold woodcut of the Tower of London and the announcement that there were trains to it every few minutes.

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